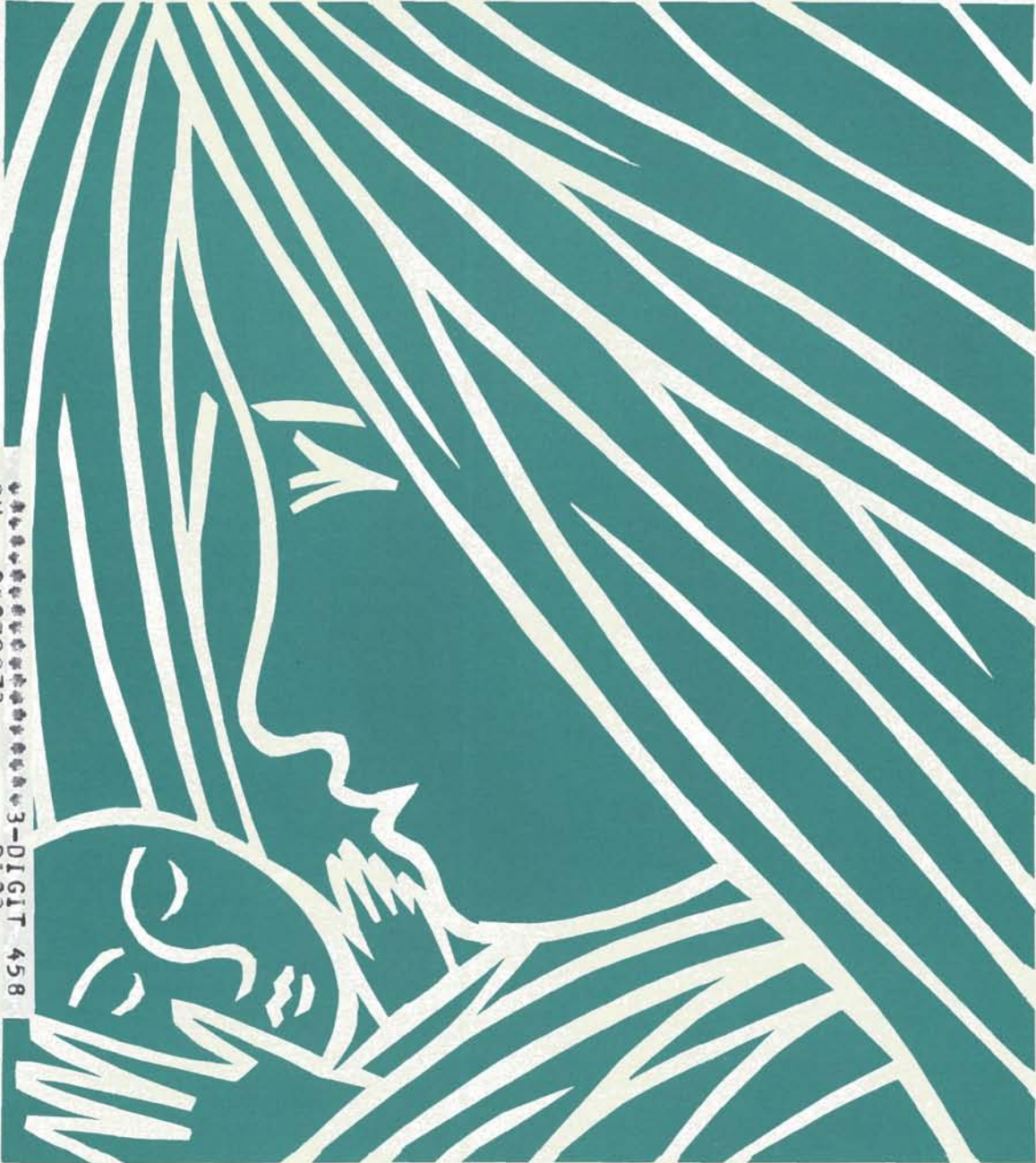


COMMONWEAL

ARE TOYS US? Emil Antonucci - FOLLOWING CHRIST IN PERU

SOVIET CHURCHES SEAL

Ernest W. Ranly - REPORTS: Venezuela - Dublin - Twin Peaks



WOULD YOU HAVE RECOGNIZED JESUS? John Garvey

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CORRESPONDENCE

Amidei on target

Chester, Conn.

To the Editors: "Variant Views on Abortion," by Nancy Amidei [October 26], was an excellent report, and my own observations confirm the points made by the author. Would that every bishop would read this article, as most of them, with a few notable exceptions, seem determined to ignore any points of view which are incompatible with their own. The editors are to be commended for their part in "Continuing the Debate."

EDMUND T. DELANEY

Who is human?

Commerce, Tex.

To the Editors: Nancy Amidei's recitation of abortion viewpoints scants the fundamental issue: What does it mean to be human? Abortion proponents bury the reality under a veil of "personhood." The view science gives us today of the child in the womb negates such an artificial division.

We came only grudgingly to acknowledge the full humanity of the landless, of blacks, and of women. Why are we so slow to recognize that government's role in preventing child abuse must logically extend to abuse of power by pregnant women?

EDWARD M. CORBETT

Divided camps

Washington, D.C.

To the Editors: Nancy Amidei's comments make an important point that so many of us involved in the so-called debate over abortion often miss. The people on either side of the issue do not make up monolithic groups. Within each of the camps are people with varied opinions.

A study of obstetrician/gynecologists in 1985 showed that although 84 percent favored the option of abortion in some circumstances, two-thirds did not perform abortions themselves. Of the 13 percent who would not favor abortion under any circumstances, 55 percent referred patients requesting abortion to other physicians.

We know from reliable studies that Catholics in the U.S. use contraception and have abortions at rates that are not dissimilar from those of the rest of the population. The so-called anti-abortion movement is split between those who say that abortion and contraception should never be used and those who view responsible use of contraception as a way to avoid the need for abortion.

MORTON A. LEBOW

The writer is associate director for public information, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

Raïssa remembered

Mishawaka, Ind.

To the Editors: Sadly, Madeline Marget's "Too Much Ado about Raïssa" [October 12] totally missed the point. Judith Suther's skillful book is not a biography of a saint but primarily a volume of literary evaluation. I might be expected to appreciate the suggestion that Véra Oumançoff, my godmother, would be a more appropriate subject of a biography than Raïssa; I do not, nor would Véra. Considering the intimate relationship between the Maritains and *Commonweal*, they both deserved better.

ANTHONY O. SIMON

The writer is director of the Yves R. Simon Institute.

Reviewer prejudiced

Toronto, Ont.

To the Editors: Madeline Marget's review...appeared under the title "Too Much Ado about Raïssa." Many people who have studied the Maritains have long thought there should be more ado about Raïssa and are happy that Suther's book has finally dealt with the issue. Marget compliments Suther's work as "elegantly constructed" and "thoroughly researched"; nevertheless, she expresses strong reservations about Raïssa herself.

Marget's reaction seems to reflect two common prejudices. The first is that a person who is active and productive will project these traits to other people. Marget

makes a point of stressing Raïssa's inactivity and describes her life as characterized by "nonevents" and "lethargy." A simple enumeration of Raïssa's accomplishments, however, quickly proves the opposite. Her twelve volumes, articles, correspondence, projects with artists, endless editorial assistance offered to her husband Jacques, and unacknowledged contributions to his work, let alone her work with the Thomist study circle (which after twenty years came to involve thousands of people), when added up amount to a rather daunting achievement.

Suther chooses not to allow her book to be monopolized by these accomplishments; instead, she focuses on what mattered to Raïssa, her contemplative vocation and its place in her writings. With reference to Raïssa's domestic inactivity, Marget calls her "an over- and self-protected girl" and someone who "expected others to take care of her." Apparently domestic inactivity was acceptable in Jacques, but Raïssa should have been not only professionally accomplished but an all-around, self-sufficient woman as well.

Marget's second prejudice lies in her attitude toward the contemplative vocation. She seems not to regard contemplation as

(Continued on page 762)

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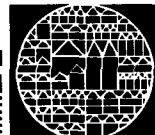
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COMMONWEAL



A fragile gift

In the midst of a precarious peace, Christmas is upon us once again. At least for the moment, the world is dressed in gaudy colors, topped off with silver and gold tinsel and blinking lights. In every commercial space, the crooning ghost of Bing Crosby, more haunting than the clanking chains of Jacob Marley, insinuates itself. On TV, the observance of *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Miracle on 34th Street* is piously enforced on a dozen channels. In more formal settings, platoons of carolers or the exalted strains of Handel and Bach can be heard. At home, we welcome those most persistent of strangers—relatives. The clinking of glasses and murmur of gossip come to us from distant rooms, and the balm of the pine tree fills the house. Every Christmas finds us waiting, as breathless as a child at the top of the stairs Christmas morning, for the world to be made over. And so it is.

Contrary to popular complaint, then, Christmas is not really for children. It is hardly a secret that in indulging our children we indulge ourselves, or at least the memory of our younger, more guileless selves. This is not simply nostalgia. Just as in the act of protecting children we are made braver than we otherwise would be, so at Christmas, if we are lucky, we are made more generous than reason allows. The Christmas story, with its paradoxes of divinity humbled, strength robed in swaddling clothes, and humanity exalted, turns our attention to the eternal and heroic in the most common domestic arrangements. Even God, it seems, was born into a family. Household piety, instinct instructs, is the source of all virtue. To paraphrase Chesterton, the Christmas drama reveals something at the back of our own heart that betrays us into good. Or so we devotedly hope.

This year, as every year, we celebrate what God has done while waiting anxiously to see if men and women will respond to that good. Invasion and pillage and the threat of a wider war in the Middle East darken these days. Peace, peace, cried the prophet, but there is no peace. That is as true now as it was the day God was born an ordinary baby among a persecuted people in an obscure land. Not much appears to have changed since Herod's soldiers went out to slay the innocent.

In this light, peace between nations seems as fragile as the delicate glass balls that give a Christmas tree its gossamer beauty. If held too firmly or fought over thoughtlessly, they turn to dust in your hands. Left on the floor, they are soon smashed underfoot. Wherever you look, it takes a world of care to halt carnage.

In the end peace comes as a gift. Political theorists and politicians profess a thousand different strategies as they court it—and in truth peace is a task as well as a gift. But when peace arrives, ordinary men and women know it for the miracle it is. We pray for that outcome at this time, hoping that when the opportunity for peace presents itself we will be as open to it as Mary was to the incredible words of the angel Gabriel.

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MEMORIES OF FEBRUARY 27

UNCOVERING THE DEADLY TRUTH

“Febuary 27” has become a household phrase in Venezuela, synonymous with popular outrage and protests. On that day in 1989 spontaneous riots swept most of the nation’s urban centers. Although the disturbances were triggered by increases in public transportation fares, they were really a popular reaction to the steady deterioration in living conditions over the decade and austerity measures imposed by the International Monetary Fund. After more than twenty-four hours of widespread looting, security forces entered poor neighborhoods and opened fire indiscriminately during the remainder of the week, which was when most of the casualties took place.

Nearly two years later, on October 23, 1990, Venezuela’s attorney general ordered the exhumation of the skeletons of the untold number of unidentified victims who had been interred in common burial pits. The recent decision is a major victory for human rights groups that had called for clarification of the circumstances surrounding the deaths, punishment of those responsible, and compensation for those who received permanent injuries. Human rights groups have maintained a relatively low profile, in part because they are aware that February 27 is a sharp sting in the memory of influential sectors, whose image of Venezuela as South America’s most stable and pacific democracy was turned upside down.

The attorney general’s order—if it is carried out—will allow next of kin to locate the remains of their deceased loved ones. Human rights groups, in calling for the measure, invoked the principle of religious liberty: the right to sepulcher relatives in family graves and engage in the funeral rites of their choice. The attorney general’s ruling is based on Article 65 of the Constitution and Article 18 of the “International Convention of Civil and Political Rights” that sanctifies these practices subject only to considerations of public health, order, and morality.

Naturally, the religious implications of the demand for exhumation is of special concern to the church. Indeed, on the first anniversary of the disturbances, the monthly Jesuit magazine *SIC* devoted a special issue to the subject, under the title, “February 27: No to Oblivion.”

As of November, however, the Health Ministry has not granted permission for the exhumations. Government authorities claim that disinterment on such a massive scale would represent a health hazard. In fact, their resistance may well be the product of fear that official statistics, which place the number of deaths during the disturbances at 276, will be discredited. *SIC* editor, Father José Lazcano, told me in August that, on the basis of the testimony of people who worked in different assistance centers throughout Caracas and elsewhere, there were as many as 2,000

fatalities. Other commentators put the figure as high as 3,000.

The dilatory tactics of Venezuelan judicial authorities in some thirty cases involving people who were gunned down during the disturbances have not deterred family members from carrying on their cases. Lazcano told me that for them, “time is not a factor since they are determined to see the lawsuits to the end.”

In a number of the lawsuits, the victims were teen-agers and even children. One case involves the alleged deaths of three dozen people who were waiting in the morning to use public phones to report that they would not be able to get to work that day. The sole survivor of that incident, who was permanently maimed, is the plaintiff.

None of the victims in the cases that are in the courts were political activists, save one, thus putting the lie to initial government claims that professional agitators had provoked the riots. The one exception was Cristanto Mederos, a poet and member of the nation’s second largest party, the Social Christian COPEI. Relatives who resided in a neighboring house are willing to testify that Mederos was slain in his bed and to identify his military assassins. In spite of considerable resistance, they were able to scour the common graves and succeeded in locating his body, which was seriously disfigured, apparently by the impact of machine gun butts. Attached to a leg was a tag with the words; “Unidentified. Do Not Hand Over.” The house of Mederos’s mother, who is a leading member of the Committee of Relatives of the Victims of February-March (COFAVIC), was subsequently illegally raided by the police, most likely in an effort to intimidate her.

COFAVIC scored a small victory earlier this year. In April, the Supreme Court agreed to consider COFAVIC’s request that the cases be tried in civilian rather than military courts. Although the regular judicial system is subject to the same bureaucratic and corrupt practices that plague the rest of the nation’s public sphere, the impartiality of military justice is even more suspect. While, as of November, five verdicts have been reached by civilian judges condemning city police for abuse of authority during the disturbances, the military courts (which have been assigned most of the suits) have not rendered a single decision. Considering that military judges are generally less overburdened with work than civilian judges, this negligence is especially unjustifiable. Military judges have also refused to cooperate with family members and human rights groups in providing basic information regarding the progress of the cases.

One of COFAVIC’s lawyers, Liliana Ortega, justifies her organization’s position on grounds that “at no moment during the week of February 27 was civilian justice suspended, even though certain constitutional guarantees were by presidential decree. The decree, however, did not give security forces carte blanche, nor were international rights ever annulled. The problem is that February 27 was the first time in decades that Venezuela faced an emergency situation like this. Civilian judges are reluctant to take these cases because they—like security forces and the public in general at the time—are ignorant regarding the limits of the suspension decree.”

The issues raised by organizations such as COFAVIC and the priests who publish *SIC* are of great relevance for Venezuela, as for the rest of the continent. The dire poverty that, according

to official statistics, afflicts a majority of Venezuelans makes a recurrence of February 27 possible at any moment. In fact increases in transportation fares and gasoline prices in 1990 have sparked dozens of lesser disturbances that have forced the government to call out the military. Although student disorders are nothing new in Venezuela, protests of the urban poor against deficient public services, in which political party leaders are notably absent, is a recent phenomenon that has become an everyday occurrence. To prevent a breakdown of public order, in early November President Carlos Andrés Pérez explicitly forbade the occupation of public buildings and streets. In the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Peru, and elsewhere in Latin America, spontaneous riots have become an important form of popular protest, perhaps demonstrating the inadequate mobilization capacity of leftist parties.

According to Father Arturo Sosa, a leading political scientist who is director of SIC, "the objective of military aggression on February 27 was to produce visceral fear in the memory of people so that they would realize just how far the dominant elites are willing to go....The established order wants people to feel ashamed [of what happened]. It is important that this vision not be instilled. February 27 was not an 'excess' or a 'bad night.' It was a protest in which people were obliged to utilize extraordinary channels. It was a night that the Venezuelan people should be proud of and remember as an experience in which they were the protagonists."

Even for those who see February 27 as an unmitigated tragedy, the need to define acceptable behavior for authorities during emergency situations has emerged as an important issue. This is particularly true because most of the victims of February 27 were bystanders who did not participate in the rioting and looting. Even beyond the importance of establishing the innocence of those who were gunned down is the paramount principle of protecting the right to life of all Venezuela's citizens.

STEVE ELLNER

Steve Ellner writes frequently from Venezuela for Commonweal. He is the author of From Guerrilla Defeat to Innovative Politics: Venezuela's Movement Toward Socialism (Duke University Press).

REPORT FROM 'TWIN PEAKS'

INCEST FOR THE MILLIONS

SAYING NO TO DAVID LYNCH

A couple of Saturday nights ago, as Leland Palmer (and his savage alter ego "Bob") were beating his (their?) niece to death, I turned off the television and said goodbye to "Twin Peaks" and David Lynch. I know I wasn't alone. That scene, remarkable for its prolonged, calculated, almost loving gruesomeness, was the final straw.

I'm not about to claim the squeaky-clean virtue of ex-smokers or the recently converted. Since last spring "Twin Peaks" has had me edgy and a little defensive, titillated and a little guilty—but completely in its spell. I loved the music and the atmosphere, the lurking danger that kept me from relaxing, Agent Cooper's wacky combination of steel-trap rationality and Tibetan intuition, Nadine's eyepatch, and Dr. Jacoby's earplugs.

And it was sexy. There was bad sex and good sex, but sex was everywhere: from the discovery of Laura Palmer's naked body to Audrey's slinky come-ons to *Flesh* magazine to nearly everyone's secret love affairs.

It was like nothing I'd ever seen on TV before, and if Leo Johnson's wife-beating seemed a little overdone, if Donna Hayward seemed a little too good to be true, well, then, the ensemble, the gestalt, the Lynchian vision, at least, seemed to work, to shake me up, to create unpredictable postmodern atmospherics in the place of one-liners and laughtracks. I was seduced.

David Lynch will not be surprised that I cannot stop thinking about that final scene, which I turned off just as I guessed Leland/Bob was about to shove a small letter deep under Maddy's bloody fingernail. Leland and his beast-like twin, the deranged long-haired mystery man, were twirling in a deadly dance with the dark-haired stand-in for Leland's murdered daughter. The figure alternated between kissing the girl (as Leland) and screaming incoherently and making as if to bite her throat (as "Bob"). The camera stayed close through this bloody and terrifying *pas de deux*, delighting in its ability to show both men. The point for "Twin Peaks" (get it?) fans is that Leland killed his own daughter—that's who killed Laura Palmer.

Even this discovery is just part of the story. For the real secret to "Twin Peaks" and Laura's murder, the real message of that scene, is incest: father-daughter incest. I suppose I knew it, didn't want to think about it. Lynch had seduced me into his forbidden world. And now it's the morning after and I'm ashamed.

The poles of sexuality in last season's episodes were good girl Donna and bad girl Audrey. They're both high-school girls with the bodies of Playmates. Laura was sleeping with (at least) Ben Horne, Dr. Jacoby, Leo Johnson, James, Bobby, and the patrons of One-Eyed Jacks. Audrey lusts for Agent Cooper, who can barely resist her, and in a scene which lasted quite a long time, nearly slept with her own father at the brothel. Nadine has survived her suicide attempt thinking she's sixteen while her husband is forty-ish. James and Donna are sleeping with Laura through each other, while James nearly has a fling with Laura's look-alike cousin.

The patterns here are all incest: brother-sister, father-daughter, and mostly the latter. What's Lynch saying? That all sex is incest? That we all carry the marks of Oedipal struggle in our psyches? Maybe so. But I bet it's something a lot crasser; underneath all the fancy music it's fairly simple: forbidden sex sells. Why else have Donna tell a dreamy story about her and Laura skinny-dipping and partying with college boys when they were thirteen and fourteen.

If that was gratuitous what shall we call the week-by-week layering of details reconstructing Laura's murder: the number of men she slept with that night, the nature of her injuries, the

kinds of drugs she'd consumed, how she'd been tied up, how she'd been pecked by the Myna bird named Waldo... I can hardly believe I'm writing this stuff down. It's as though Lynch tried to think of a series of cruelties that would boggle any imagination and add them on, week by week. That way we wouldn't notice all at once; we'd be gradually seduced, in the way that a diabolical wife might addict her husband to a drug by doctoring his food over a period of months.

Once you start this process, what you used to be able to chalk up to quirky weirdness looks much more malevolent. I mean, I thought the camera used to stay just a little too close to Leo as he beat Shelley with a bar of soap in a sock. But what about now, as Leo vegetates in the wheelchair, drooling and flopping? The genuine discomfort you feel is perfectly justified. Or how did you like the detail as Audrey, bound and helpless at the brothel, was frequently injected with drugs? This isn't offbeat—the gori-ness quotient is out of control.

If taboo sex and violence with classy background music add up to a vision, I'll pass. No doubt Lynch will figure out how to put a tragic-flaw kind of moral in the story: that Leland's rape of his daughter (like Macbeth's guilty ambition) led to all the rest. But it's taken too long, and he likes the story too much. He's still pandering. I think he's getting away with murder.

WARREN GOLDSTEIN

Warren Goldstein teaches American Studies at the State University of New York at Old Westbury.

REPORT FROM DUBLIN

HELLO, MRS. ROBINSON

A NEW TURN FOR IRELAND

The inauguration of Ireland's first woman president, Mrs. Mary Robinson, on December 3 was seen here as marking far more than a welcome boost for Irish women. For the surprise victory in the November 7 presidential election of a lawyer with a long track record of working for the liberalization of laws on contraception and divorce as well as championing the right to information on abortion is being hailed as a milestone in the development of Irish society.

The forty-six-year-old Robinson has long been a controversial figure. Her twenty-year career as a Labor party member in the Irish Senate was characterized by her outspoken advocacy of liberal causes. Her concern that the viewpoint of Northern Ireland Protestants was not adequately taken into account at the time of the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 led to her resignation from the Labor party and her return to private life.

She was surprised, therefore, to be approached by the party last January and invited to stand as Labor's presidential candidate. And, while many commentators hailed the party's imaginative and courageous choice, no one gave Robinson a serious chance

The next issue of *Commonweal* will
be dated January 11, 1991.

of winning. The Labor party, with 12 percent of the votes, along with the Workers party and the Green party, would give her a support base of around 20 percent. As the Labor party leader, Dick Spring, put it on the night the result was declared: "Six months ago people would not have given us a thousand-to-one chance of winning."

Many reasons are being given for what is seen as the greatest electoral upset in Irish politics. Among them are serious blunders made by the governing Fianna Fáil party and the difficulties of the main opposition party, Fine Gael, in finding a candidate. Also to be taken into account is that the office of president is largely ceremonial with few real powers, and that the outcome has no direct effect on the government.

Most commentators give the credit to Robinson herself for the victory. Her six-month campaign concentrated not on the high-profile rallies so favored by the larger parties but on traveling the length and breadth of the country, visiting grassroots groups, tapping into the concerns of ordinary people, and defining the presidency as a resource to encourage and strengthen what she described as the "fightback" she had discovered among the people. Her strategy was borne out on polling day. While much of her support came from the urban, liberal middle class, as well as a sizable working-class vote, what gave Robinson the edge was her surprising strength in rural hamlets, places where she had no party machine working for her. Women had turned out in large numbers to support her. As Robinson said herself: "The women of Ireland went out there to vote. They went out because they had a sense of purpose. It is a great day for us, for our children and our grandchildren."

While that achievement is unique in Irish political history, its significance may be even more remarkable. Her election closed a decade in which the Irish electorate had decisively rejected the legalization of divorce and had added a clause to the constitution protecting the right to life of the unborn. The Supreme Court has since interpreted this to make any dissemination of information on abortion illegal, including the telephone numbers of abortion clinics outside of Ireland.

On these issues the new president was an outspoken opponent of what proved to be the people's will, a fact her opposition continually brought to the attention of the electorate. Her victory is therefore all the more remarkable, and indicates that the Irish electorate is more sophisticated and complex than many give it credit for. Other commentators have seen the victory as the breakthrough into national politics of the new, young, and pluralist Ireland. As Robinson said in interview after interview during her campaign: We want to hold our head up with pride as Irish people in the new Europe. The traditional alliance of conservative Catholicism and nationalism, on which the present governing Fianna Fáil party built its electoral support, appears now decidedly on the wane.

Interestingly, the church played no part in the election cam-

paign. Privately many grassroots church workers would have supported her, but one can only speculate that she would not have been the preferred choice of many senior churchmen. In an interview in a music magazine early in the campaign, she strongly attacked the "male-dominated patriarchy" of the Catholic church, terms the Irish are not used to hearing from candidates for high office. But in a subsequent television interview, she identified herself as a Catholic who takes her Catholicism very seriously. She said she supports the kind of church that stands by the poor, as embodied by some priests and sisters whose names she mentioned.

All agree, however, that Robinson's victory is largely symbolic. Even the most enthusiastic left-wing activist would not claim that it represents any great electoral breakthrough for left-wing politics, or that Fianna Fáil will be decimated in the next general election. But it does leave analysts wondering what it says about the issues that will determine the shape of Irish politics.

In a more immediate way, the election will have its impact on the two major parties. Much to everyone's surprise, the campaign that was expected to be an easy victory by Fianna Fáil Deputy Prime Minister Brian Lenihan, ended up throwing both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael into disarray. Fine Gael's problems were predictable. Traditionally the major opposition party, under the leadership of the former Prime Minister Garret FitzGerald, it rivaled Fianna Fáil's dominance of Irish politics. But the party has slumped badly over recent years. Its performance in this presidential election was seen as the final test of its leader, Alan Dukes. The fact that the party's candidate, Austin Currie, managed only 17 percent of the poll in the three-way presidential contest immediately opened the prospect of a serious threat to Dukes's leadership from within the party.

The impact of the campaign on Fianna Fáil was not foreseen. Brian Lenihan, a loyal party member who had served in government for decades, enjoyed warm popular support across the political spectrum. This was enhanced by a widely publicized kidney transplant early last year which saw him return to active politics with a new lease on life. No one doubted he would be Ireland's next president.

Yet Robinson proved a formidable opponent, tapping into a widespread feeling that the presidency should be more than a consolation prize for retiring politicians, and Lenihan found himself forced to accept the agenda of a more active working presidency. Then, two weeks before polling day, the campaign was suddenly electrified. When asked on a television show whether he had telephoned President Hillery in February 1982 to influence him not to call a general election after a coalition government of Fine Gael and Labor was defeated on a vote in the Dáil (parliament), Lenihan denied the charge. But a few days later, the *Irish Times* released a taped interview of last May in which Lenihan admitted he had made that call. Lenihan's admission that he had tried to influence the president's decision reflected negatively on his capacity to fill the presidential office with independence; then his contradictory versions of events badly damaged his credibility.

Senior government ministers, including the Taoiseach (prime minister), Charles Haughey, supported Lenihan's denials, but with the government's credibility damaged, the minority partner in government, the Progressive Democrats, demanded that Lenihan be dismissed and Haughey complied by sacking his loyal lieutenant. This attracted some public sympathy for Lenihan, and the party hoped his success in the election would limit the fallout of the affair. Losing the presidency, however, adds further to the party's problems. While a leadership challenge is not immediately predicted, the affair has inflicted serious wounds on Ireland's largest party.

Before polling day, with Lenihan and Robinson running neck and neck in the opinion polls, the *Irish Times* said the outcome of the election would tell Ireland a lot about itself. What it tells has shocked many but elated others. It may yet be seen as opening an era in which the Irish political system regained the ability to express the real issues and struggles dividing Irish society. As many have remarked of the result, it reveals an Ireland looking forward to the future with hope rather than forever looking back at the past with nostalgia.

PEADAR KIRBY

Peadar Kirby is a free-lance journalist who reports frequently on Ireland and Europe for Commonweal.

OF SEVERAL MINDS John Garvey

IF YOU HAD BEEN THERE...

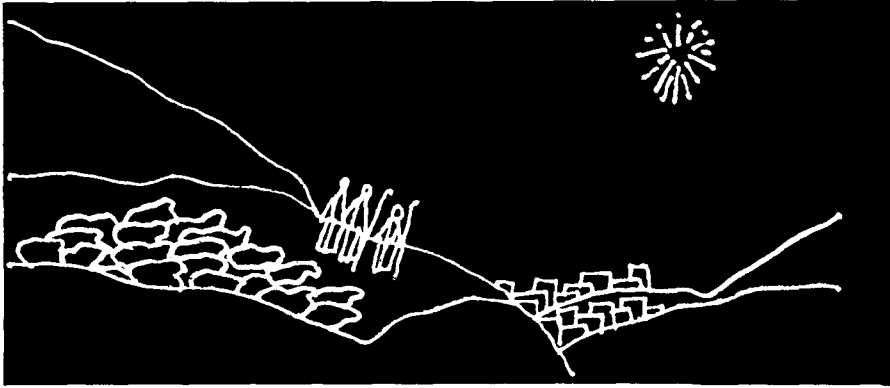
WOULD YOU HAVE RECOGNIZED JESUS?

The sin against the Holy Spirit is the one that Jesus said was beyond forgiveness. It is plainly the one to avoid. But what is it? At one level it could be seen as the refusal to recognize the Spirit at work in Jesus. There is more

to it than that, though: "Any man who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but if anyone speaks against the Holy Spirit, there is no forgiveness, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matthew 12:31).

One traditional—and much too nar-

row—interpretation has been that despair is the unforgivable sin, presumably because it is impermeable—you refuse to allow mercy to touch you. That makes sense, but to try to find one particular sin and identify it here is a mistake. These words are, at least, a call to radical humility. It is important to see that the text does not say that it is a sin *not* to recognize the Spirit, to fail in that perception, to be blind. The sin is in a more willful thing: a denial, a refusal. What is condemned is not failure to recognize the Son of Man, Jesus. The implication is that, even more important than this, there is a failure to see the work of the Spirit, the least known—one might say



the most elusive, even tricky—person of the Trinity.

No one deliberately speaks against the Holy Spirit. If this warning is here for a reason, what is it?

This may be a call to a silence and reverence, a recognition that ordinarily we do not know, maybe cannot know, where the Spirit is at work. To deny the Holy Spirit may be to deny holiness in places where we are not accustomed to finding it. His opponents—acting, no doubt, in good faith, convinced that Jesus was behaving in inappropriate and even blasphemous ways—were guilty of this denial, guilty even though their intentions may very well have been pure, or may have felt pure to them (there is an important difference).

A few verses later, Matthew has Jesus say, “I tell you this: there is not a thoughtless word that comes from men’s lips but they will have to account for it on the day of judgment. For out of your own mouth you will be acquitted; out of your own mouth you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:36-37). Again, what is condemned here is not a failure to act—it is not failing to say the right thing—but an insistence on speaking where one should not, that leads to trouble.

There are places in the New Testament where Jesus condemns the failure to act, where “not doing” is as sinful as doing something wrong. The religiously correct people who fail to help the beaten man are not loving, and therefore are not servants of God, whereas the religiously uncorrect Samaritan is.

The text does not say that religious correctness is beside the point. We are told that no one can set aside any part of the law, and also told that “the Sabbath was made for man; man was not made for the

Sabbath.” It is precisely religious correctness, seen rightly, that is involved in not speaking where one may not, and in not denying the action of the Holy Spirit. Taking this seriously could mean, for example, that we must at the very least not deny the work of the holy in the compassion recommended by Buddhism or the desire for radical obedience to God’s word represented by fundamentalism, however awkwardly.

The radical humility called for here does not come easily to religious people. We want to know for sure, and to say what we know; or we want what lies beneath this sense of “knowing for sure”—we want to feel that we are on the right track in some way we can check out by referring to an external referent, some certain way, a polestar. This, very often, will separate us from others and is even intended to do so: we are not like Muslims in this, not like Jews in that, not like fundamentalist Christians in another way; we are at pains to show that we are not conservatives, or not liberals; or we search for a positive criterion, like the Bible, or a church which cannot make mistakes, either because the church’s “long haul” or tradition is a reliable guide (as Orthodox believe), or because the church has a guaranteed source of infallibility in a magisterium protected from error (as Catholics believe). Or we look for political and social correctness as a criterion for what really matters, religiously—whatever the vehicle is, is unimportant: nearly anything will do, as long as it persuades us that we are on the right track.

The domestication of the holy is the worst thing religion does, and that is what is involved in all of these moves. When Charles Williams wrote that God commanded altars to be set up so that he could send down fire *somewhere else*, he could

have been writing about the sin Jesus said could not be forgiven. The failure to recognize the Spirit in Jesus strikes us (protected as we are from any real encounter with the reality that faced first-century Palestinians) as obvious.

Let’s move the question to more nervous-making grounds: given my temperament, I am not sure that, if I had lived at that time, I would have regarded the claims of Jesus as any more impressive than those of the Maharishi or Jim Jones. I might have liked a lot of his ideas, his emphasis on what really mattered in Judaism; but when he, or his followers, claimed more after his death, when the claim was made that he was Messiah (despite the fact that the Messiah was to have been an earthly and triumphant ruler who really would redeem the whole nation and be obvious in his triumphs), I might very well have looked around an obviously unredeemed world and denied that assertion.

Would that be the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit? Far be it from me to say that it wouldn’t. I don’t know. But I do have a feeling that we are much too comfortable with belief, most of us, *wherever* we are with it. We settle into it, which is precisely what we are not meant to do. Faith is not meant to make us uncomfortable; but it should at least make us alert.

Jesus’ words about the sin against the Holy Spirit seem to me to fit into the same category as his words about being constantly prepared for his coming: we are always to be like sentries, always on the alert. To see the Spirit where the Spirit is, or at least not to deny the presence of the Spirit, requires a discernment that can only be learned through the alertness Jesus calls us to practice constantly. That alertness is itself a gift of the Holy Spirit, and can come only with prayer and struggle.

Ordinary religious understanding can dwindle into convention: it isn’t at all *likely* that salvation of the human race and the meaning of the universe would all come down to events in the life of a Jew from an unimportant town in an unimpressive province of the Roman Empire. Nothing is less likely than what we celebrate at Christmas. Some were able to see it, and become obedient to what God revealed there. I am far from sure that I would have been among them. □

ARE TOYS US?

A TINY FORTRESS WAS MY GOD

EMIL ANTONUCCI

Christmas is not so much about childhood as the memory of childhood, that time when we felt the world to be the extension of our imaginations in time and space, and felt, consequently, that terror and ecstasy of being responsible for everything, of possessing the power of transforming the world to fit our deepest desires. Growing up as I did during the Depression gives all my memories of Christmas a dark intensity, full of longing for toys never received, and each Christmas, the unquenchable hope that this time the miracle would happen.

I must admit that all my memories of childhood are almost exclusively of toys. Adults and most children were like trees in a forest through which I wended my fearful and cautious way. Toys were the sensuous objectification of my ability to recreate the world in my imagination, to make even the humblest object sacred. *I can remember in intense detail every toy I possessed, their colors and shapes, their tactile presence in my hands, the minute markings of wear that gave each of them a history.* That sheer, direct, unmediated experience of the physical world has never been surpassed. Most children, I think, live with dark and violent emotions. The loss of childhood innocence is not so much a moral issue as that gradual blunting of our responses, the ebbing of our unique, individual passions and perceptions, the deflation of the intensity of the world to a physical husk. The tragic separation of matter from spirit.

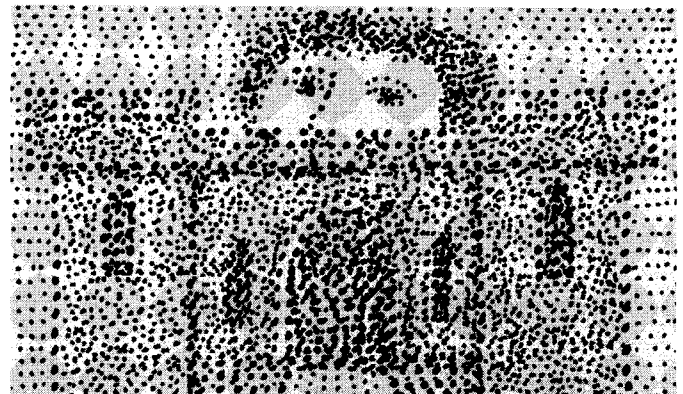
My archetypical Christmas was my tenth one. The world was stumbling out of the depths of the Depression into world war; my father finding his first steady job in five years, at the New York World's Fair, of all places, a stunning symbol of hope in a city sunk in the grayness of poverty and fear.

As a child, I had become somehow convinced that adults had the power to read children's minds, so that I was constantly struggling between attempts at extreme secrecy to protect my private world and emitting mental beams of laser intensity on birthdays and Christmas in hope of receiving some absolute

object of desire as a gift. Coming right out and asking for something seemed out of the question when money was so scarce. The toy that I was sick with desire for that year was, in any case, the most expensive thing I had ever wanted. A medieval castle, cunningly made from interlocking pieces of printed cardboard, complete with moat and drawbridge with an inner courtyard and tower. It seemed, in the store window, impossibly large and completely out of reach. But it was, and remains, in my mind what the French call an *objet de vertu*. Its power and delight did not depend on its usefulness or on my need. It existed in its own joyful right, radiant with beauty, and it gave me comfort to know that it existed at all.

Christmas came, in that magical descent into wintry night and glowing lamplight that transformed even the seediest street in our neighborhood into a world of private glamour. Like many Italian families, we celebrated Christmas Eve and presents were opened at midnight. By that time I would usually be ill from feverish expectancy and the refusal to leave the living room Christmas tree for fear of missing even the smallest moment of the great event.

That midnight, by some miracle no one in the family can remember or explain, my castle appeared under the tree. It was the last pure confirmation of belief in the power of my imagination to transform the world. That night left a traumatic legacy on my subsequent career as world reformer and artist. All that night I lay in bed contemplating what had happened and luxuriating in the plans I made for playing with my toy castle.



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The next day, Christmas Day, after Mass, the relatives arrived, bringing a small threatening cadre of cousins. I was prepared. I had placed the castle carefully behind the tree, masked by the snow village and American Flyer trains at its base and I stood unobtrusive guard all day. I did not reckon with one of my favorite cousins, a girl whom I perceived as having no interest in my little male bastion. But she was intrigued by the view from our bay window in front of which our tree stood. I could only watch, dumbstruck, as she deftly slipped into the space and planted a new patent leather shoe on the tower of my castle. My cries and tears brought help. My father, even in those days before scotch tape, did an admirable repair job. But my castle was never the same. I still loved it and played for hours with the toy for

years to come, but only with that poignant mixture of love and pain that marks the onset of adult life.

To fall in love with the physical world must be what incarnation means. To leave the safety of pure spirit for the dangerous immersion in fragile nature. That God should enter the world, not as some spiritual or mental manifestation, but as a child of flesh, the most helpless and vulnerable of creatures, is beyond comprehension, but essential to our understanding of what religious experience is. Incarnation is far more mysterious to me than resurrection. Life after death seems really no more difficult, on reflection, than life before death. The mystery of the world is not how or why but *that* it exists, the philosopher tells us.

The seductive appeal of Catholicism, for me, is that it asserts the continuity of the physical and spiritual worlds: the Mystical Body, resurrection of the body, the glorified body after the last day. All doctrines that redeem nature, not revile it. It is the idea of nature as separate from spirit that produces materialism in the worst sense. If nature is not imbued with spirit, then we can, as we have, treat it with impunity, mere dross to be consumed and excreted as we pursue some platonic ideal. But, if we see the world and everything in it, no matter how humble, as having the potential of embodying spirit, we are obliged to treat it with respect and see, as an artist does his materials and the child its toys, infinity in that grain of sand.

The failure of our consumer society is in squeezing out of matter all semblance of spirit, of co-opting our deepest imaginative values and turning them into disposable commodities. Is it still possible in a world proliferating in expendable products to humanly relate to any artifact? To feel love for and delight in something human beings fabricate is essential to our spiritual well-being. Is deprivation and poverty the only way to find value in possessions? Children are inundated with toys, targeted by the most sophisticated marketing techniques available. And yet, left to their own devices, I think they still have the capacity to choose and relate to toys in deep, personal ways. For when toys arrive as a gift that shows understanding and insight, they respond with a delight that transcends greed. For gift giving is an art, not a business; it is to truly recognize another person, to show true attention. And attention is a form of love.

The magic of childhood lies in that feeling that the world is part of ourselves. Children feel the Mystical Body implicitly. We adults are only just beginning to formulate a language for this perception of the world. Ironically, technology is making this a world in which we communicate at the speed of light and travel at the speed of sound. But our private experience and perception remains isolated and fragmented. We feel alone in the rush of events and our political and economic structures are premised on that isolation. We must find a way to co-opt the technological, material world, not condemn it, and to invest these forces with our spiritual values. History is replete with these transformations. This country, stricken spiritually as it is, was/is, an example of reinventing human society in a way that seemed inconceivable to the old world. What it will take to achieve this transformation I can't begin to address here, but I suspect it has something to do with children and toys. Inside every adult is a child struggling to get out.

Joan I. Siegel

Interim

The geese are gone.
Silence has moved in
and the lake creaks
like some preglacial beast
in its tight skin. Ice
cracks between rocks,
scars the bark of trees.

The air is stiff, dead
white, pencilled birch
and oak crow-black as brush
strokes in Japanese.
Only the beech holds
its leaves, copper
earrings that dangle, catch
the low pale sun and shake.

From the woods, deer come,
one by one,
ease up to the house.
Hunger is harder than fear.
We look at each other,
then they go back
behind the trees
to someplace
secret as foxes' dens.

Whatever it is
that makes sap rise
and juniper flower
is congealed in the roots,
in the marrow
of burrowed sleep.
Night comes early, pulls down
the shades of the house.

A WHIRLWIND OF VIOLENCE

FOLLOWING CHRIST IN PERU

ERNEST W. RANLY

In abstract terms, Christian spirituality is a process of transforming one's life in accord with the values and principles of Christianity. Somewhat more concretely, a Christian spirituality is the following of Jesus of Nazareth, making oneself his disciple, accepting him as Christ the Lord. "The following of Christ," says *Perfectae caritatis*, the Vatican II document on religious life, "is the supreme rule."

But in concrete terms, Christian spirituality has to become realized in everyday reality. And in Peru, where I live, that means coming to terms with paralyzing, life-threatening violence. Our need here is to define not just any way of following Christ but one that will justify and support Christians living in situations of active violence.

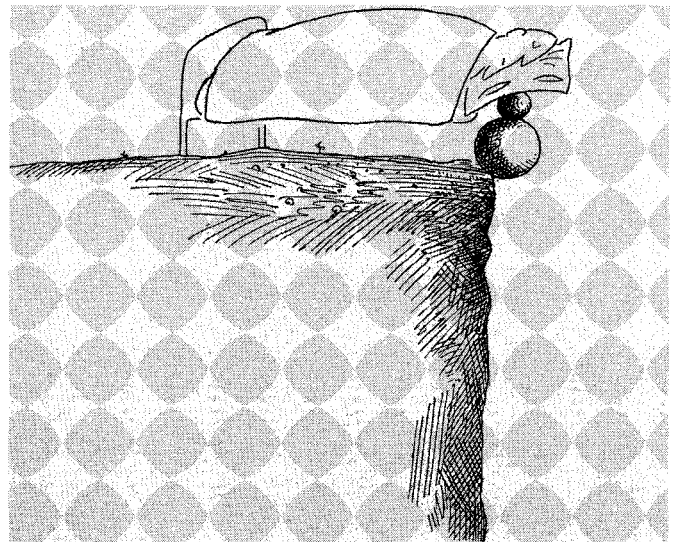
Every situation of violence must be studied very closely in its precise historical/political context. Lebanon is distinct from El Salvador, which is distinct from the drug wars of Colombia or the street fights of Northeast Washington, D.C. A spirituality must be found consistent with the stark, brutal, everyday reality of active violence as it is experienced in this place and time.

The Peru of today is in continuity with the situation I described four years ago ("Under the Peruvian Volcano," *Commonweal*, February 14, 1986). Violent subversion by the Maoist *Sendero Luminoso* ("Shining Path") continues unabated, but over the years a Castro-type group called the Revolutionary Movement Tupac Amaru (MRTA) is also a major force, along with drug lords, death squads, and sundry groups of common criminals. In this internal war, violence by the Peruvian military rivals that of the groups and individuals it seeks to suppress: in 1989, 55 percent of the documented cases worldwide presented to the UN Working Group on Disappearances were attributed to the Peruvian military. By 1989 the violence had spread all through the center of Peru, like a groundfire out of control. The death toll now stands at seventeen thousand.

In this situation a deliberate group effort was initiated to answer the question: How are we to follow Christ in situations of violence? For me, the question had a personal dimension. I had studied, taught, and written about the practice of nonviolence in an academic setting. Until, say, ten years ago, I thought I had successfully converted these ideas into a pastoral life-style in

the Central Andes; I believed, with a certain satisfaction, that I was actively witnessing to peace and justice in the name of the Kingdom. But with the escalation of violence, our small safe enclaves began to collapse in upon us. Our pastoral neighbors, the Jesuits, worked unflaggingly for twelve years on complex projects for the social, human, religious betterment of some eighteen peasant communities. "Shining Path" destroyed all their work in two months. The presence of the military only brought more deaths. The whole area is still a no man's land of uncertainty, terror, and death; as in many other parts of the world (Colombia, the Near East), people live an existential nightmare of utter absurdity. The question became: How does one remain nonviolent, talk nonviolence, train for nonviolence, in a context of uncontrolled violence?

In Peru we have sought answers out of experience and reflection. From 1986 through 1989 the Religious Conference of Peru sent intercongregational teams to the most abandoned and violent areas of the high mountains. Four times a year groups of from fifteen to twenty missionaries were carefully prepared and sent off, and on their return were debriefed. We were left with a common collective experience of what it is like to live, at least temporarily, under the "limit" situation of violence. What follows is an effort, which draws upon a number of retreats and conferences with religious from all over Peru, to extract from this experience what I hope will be valid for a spirituality of non-



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violence for Christians in similar situations elsewhere.

Grace presupposes and builds upon the natural. A Christian spirituality must build upon solid health of mind and body. Given that premise, we found it necessary to address directly the issue of fear, of the extraordinary stress and anxiety brought on by the open violence we are experiencing in many parts of Peru. Fear is a powerful, gripping, twisting emotion that is not easily kept under the control of mind or will. Rising as it does out of our most basic instinct, self-preservation, fear is not only irrepressible but useful—essential, in fact, in helping the prudent person assess real dangers. Thus it can be pragmatically and psychologically dangerous to deny or hide the fact of fear, or to regard it as a sign of weakness. Fear joined with guilt becomes an unbearable burden.

No one can know with certainty how she or he will react in the face of mortal danger, but there are some simple group dynamics that can help us anticipate some of our probable reactions. In some situations communities should prepare themselves for possible open conflict. They can have exercises similar to drills for fire or earthquake. If street fighting breaks out, mortar shells begin to fall, or dynamite blasts are heard, in what safe room will the community congregate? Are there candles, battery-powered radios and cassettes, enough food and water? In the jungle areas, where housing is of light wood, people have spent nights sleeping in the relative security of shower stalls.

At another level, a Christian spirituality of nonviolence presupposes a community environment of support that allows all to share openly their feelings of fear, anxiety, frustration, and helplessness. Superiors are becoming very sensitive and doubly considerate when dealing with subjects suffering under such stresses. Just as some people cannot work at high altitudes, in the tropics, or in cold damp climates, some cannot endure fear-based stress over long periods. Such persons are simply transferred far from the more conflictive areas. Meanwhile, those who stay in violent zones feel the need for more free time, more recreation, more time to share their feelings. But most of all they need a new way of following Christ.

Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. But as the science of hermeneutics teaches us, when the observer's whole world changes, the very objects of observation also change. So it is for us in Peru: we now read and study and pray over the life of Jesus from a new perspective, and the result is that we find objective elements in the story that we never saw before. I call this new image of Jesus the nonviolent Christ.

More clearly now, we see that Jesus was born into a century of rebellions, massacres, terror. The vaunted *pax Romana* was a cruel peace imposed by the Roman Empire through force of arms. In one concrete case, the Romans crucified two thousand insurgents at one time. Jesus suffered under this imperialism of a foreign military and political power that held Jewish beliefs in contempt, even blasphemed against them. Rome's puppet rulers followed the imperial style; very soon after the birth of Jesus, King Herod, for political reasons, ordered the killing of children less than two years old born in Bethlehem and its surrounding areas. The time was marked as well by class conflicts, religious fanaticism, official corruption, assaults, robberies.

Jesus lived in this environment. Many of his parables speak to the surrounding realities of injustice and cruelty: the Good Samaritan, the unjust judge, the vineyard workers-assassins. Violence reached close to him when his cousin, John the Baptist, was unjustly imprisoned and when, by the mere whim of a drunken king, John was killed and his head displayed on a platter during a feast of the royal court. Even the brutal violence we witness today in Peru can hardly match such barbarity! John's disciples lovingly buried his remains and the Gospels say that Jesus withdrew alone to pray. Jesus understood well the violence of his own times; three times he announced in detail the manner of his own death. We say, then, that it is in the spirit of Jesus to study and understand the specific tactics and strategies of the violence we know around us.

Jesus knew distinct groups of revolutionaries such as the Zealots, who insistently searched for new ways to mount insurrections against Rome. Tempted in the desert by Satan with the proffer of political power, he rejected it. The last temptation of Jesus, up to his arrest in the garden, was to take up arms in defense of his own life and of the Kingdom. Again, he refused; he would not live by the sword or be ruled by blind emotion.

In the statistics of Amnesty International, how would the imprisonment and death of Jesus be classified? Innocent, he was arrested, tortured, and condemned through a series of judicial maneuvers of dubious legality. Nonviolent himself, he suffered a cruel violent death. He died forgiving his persecutors, in obedience and in trusting fidelity to his Father. Judging this record by the new hermeneutic, we see that the nonviolence of Jesus was not a strategy to gain specific aims; his life was a message. To discern its meaning, it is good, but not enough, to meditate on the most obviously relevant gospel sayings ("Love your enemies," "Remember, they also persecuted me," "It will be given you by the Spirit what to say and what to do"). Pondering Jesus' whole life and praxis in the midst of unconstrained violence, we reach a deeper level; we are enabled to see that we are all children of Adam and Eve, and that, since Cain killed his brother Abel, ours has been a history of blood. We are a fallen race. Yet the Good News is that God loves us in the person of Jesus, poor, humble, meek. The fidelity of God is eternal. In Jesus, the word of God made flesh, God has identified himself with the human family.

This is a learning not so apparent in the experience of active nonviolence as practiced by Gandhi and King. This approach requires for its success a number of *sine qua non* conditions: a well-established state, a functioning government, a legal system (including independent courts and judges) that generates a reasonable degree of confidence and respect, and, underlying all these, a general consensus on the meaning of life, human rights, and basic ethical values. Most historical examples of active non-violent efforts have also included reliance on access to the public through the media, enabling disenfranchised people to appeal to a sense of justice shared even by some of their oppressors.

In many parts of Peru today hardly any of these conditions exist. There is not even common consensus over human rights, fundamental values, even the value of human life. The media

are severely restricted, or they rely on tertiary sources, and what they communicate is simply untrustworthy or sensationalistic. This is what is called "total violence." It is not simply a conflict between the forces of evil and the forces of good. In these conditions, it becomes irrelevant to debate just war theory or to find rationalizations for a specific armed rebellion. The ordinary tactics of active nonviolence are simply out of place. In such situations what mystique or vision will inspire people to remain nonviolent? What does one do when there is nothing to do?

What we are discovering is that the only relevant mystique is a more sober Christian spirituality of nonviolence, the hard following of the nonviolent Christ. Only a deeper, more consciously chosen love of Jesus can inspire such a spiritual commitment. We are to announce the Kingdom of God, the announcement of Jesus alive now in the flesh and blood of his followers. One seeks to remain faithful to the nonviolent Christ whom the Father loved and supported through death and resurrection.

In situations of violence, one defines the Kingdom of God with great care, without political preferences. Under whatever regime, whether Maoist or consumer capitalist, whether dominated by drug lords, various kinds of mafias, or a military dictator, we must denounce every form of evil, be it greed, revenge, hatred, or the violence they breed; and we must announce the multiple forms of the mercy and love of God present in Christ, his teaching, his peace. We must celebrate the sacraments, above all the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity and familyhood, in new and more vital ways. We will not defend or construct a church of privilege, with titles and riches. We follow that nonviolent Christ who had not whereon to lay his head.

This is the context of the retreat/encounters being conducted within the Religious Conference of Peru in quest of a Christian spirituality of nonviolence. There is created an ambiance of trust to enable those who have lived under the stress of deep anxiety to share their experience and reflection and listen to those of others in similar or worse circumstances. Some professional people give specialized talks on psychology, human rights, local cultures. We study the violence itself, its various protagonists, its manifestations in different areas or at distinct phases of the revolutionary process. We know what forms military retaliation will take. As we have seen, Jesus understood in detail who his enemies were and what kind of death was in store for him. Simply knowing what forms violence will take confers psychological strength; fear of the unknown, in contrast, is paralyzing and more easily becomes pathological.

The atmosphere of the retreat/encounters is prayerful and reflective. Participants comb the Scriptures hungrily with their very special need of trying to remain loyal to Jesus, to themselves, and to their people in these times of violence. Against fear, we find Jesus walking across stormy waters and passing through closed doors saying: "Peace! Do not fear! It is I." In our distress we meet "our high priest, who does not remain indifferent before our weaknesses." Through the prayer of Jesus we also discover new riches in the psalms, the lamentations, the cries of Job and the prophets. The content of such prayers is faith-filled *angst*.

Donnell Hunter **Sycamores**

If you have the faith of a sycamore
it can guide you home. The first branch points north.
Follow it with the wind, but should you wander,
come back and find a seed pod—a perfect
sphere with spines. Break open carefully.
The tenth seed floats like a flake to the leaf
that hides the map of Spain. Save this leaf.
If you end up in Madrid you won't be lost.
The thickest vein twists counter-clockwise where
the red leaves under protest all let go and died.
The back roads lead to paradise: shelter,
Traveler's Joy, protection from the weather.

We begin to see that when our own people, with their deep folk piety, mourn and weep for their dead, they are praying profoundly in the traditions of the inspired prayers of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament.

We now look for different signs to attest to the presence of the Kingdom. At times we Christians, in spite of our professed faith, are still very much pagans, or at best Pelagians, trusting in our own works or thinking that economic or social advances are major criteria of the Kingdom of Heaven. Total violence strips away all such delusions. "Blessed are those who mourn" does not mean that people will never again have reason to mourn. Jesus wept repeatedly, yet his Father remained lovingly faithful to him through his prayer of agony and on the cross.

Where is the Kingdom? A powerful reflection for us is the parable of the good shepherd. The good shepherd knows his flock. The hireling flees and runs because the flock is not his. The good shepherd gives his life for his sheep. The message is decisive. Slowly we come to what we call "the spirituality of presence."

First, we ask ourselves negatively: If we leave now during moments of violence, what would this mean for our people? What would it mean for the others, the enemies of the gospel? But even more important, if because of threats and episodes of violence we abandon our people, what would this mean for ourselves, our religious communities, and the church?

The first decision is most fundamental: the decision to stay. This is not an easy or superficial decision. Yet a real presence—active, personal, committed—is basic. In Peru, to date, there has not been open persecution of the church as such. Yet many ordinary pastoral works and especially social programs are no longer possible. What is one to do when there is nothing to do? The answer is that simply staying in those areas of conflict helps to make manifest the continuing presence of the Kingdom of God. This humble, quiet, valiant presence, in solidarity with the victims of violence, is the presence of Christ among us.

We avoid specific suggestions or formulas for action. Yet,

according to what is prudently possible, we have discovered that the lives of the faith communities ought to follow their customary rhythms: Masses, sacraments, catechetics, religious feasts. After times of actual violence, the return to a normal life is very important for the health of the people, and for the psychological and spiritual health of the pastoral team itself.

And our presence should be *visible*. All the people—the suffering residents of the area, the military, the various subversive groups—should know that the church has remained in the region. We ought to shop in the public markets, take part in wakes and funerals, make home visits. During armed bus strikes, walking the streets with the people creates a wonderful sense of solidarity. When we have nothing to do we finally do what Christ did so simply and effectively: a prayerful, faith-filled spirituality of presence. As Catholics, we understand (and the people instinctively understand) that when we are present as church, Christ is mystically and sacramentally present in and through us. This now becomes a reconciling, peace-making presence; in this context the Eucharist takes on a broader sacramental, communitarian effectiveness.

In Peru (and I suspect in many parts of the world) the great majority of church people present in areas of violence are women religious. These women have a special capacity to be sacrament of God by showing the motherly, tender face of God during times of violence. The most powerful figure for us is that of Mary, the mother of Jesus, at the foot of the cross. As a Peruvian Jesuit put it, “We want to be with Mary, standing next to the cross, denouncing sin and injustice and announcing hope in God. Mary is a sign of hope in the midst of the evil power which envelops her son.”

The Christian spirituality of nonviolent presence should not be construed as an expression of mere passive resignation, of quietism or fatalism. When we say we have nothing to do, our presence is a concrete form of political/historical praxis. The spirituality of presence is in agreement with the recent Latin American spirituality of incarnation and insertion. Our nonviolence is not an escape to the desert far from the world’s problems; we choose to stay with our people and share with them their sufferings. Jesus spent long nights in prayer, but the following day he was back with people, healing lepers, touching the blind, taking babies into his arms. Mary at the foot of the cross gave highly public witness to the truth of her son’s life and the injustice of his death.

We may not be able to denounce cases of torture and the like to the public authorities (who may be the very culprits), or to protest such acts by subversive groups, or even to report them to the media, since such accounts can be distorted and manipulated by irresponsible elements. But we visit the tortured and we welcome them to share their stories with us. Christian witness is always witness to a greater truth but also to everyday fact. We see some atrocities; we hear of many more; we must never deny what we know is true. Gandhi’s whole theory of nonviolence is based upon *satyagraha*—the power of truth. Recent revelations of past atrocities in Chile, Brazil, and Eastern Europe attest to

that power. A presence that knows and preserves the truth is a powerful restraint against the father of lies and the destructive forces of darkness. And so we live inserted into the real history of our people, even when history becomes absurdly self-destructive and violent. Christian eschatology accepts no single philosophy of history and rejects utopian solutions to such absurdity. The Father remains faithful to Jesus on the cross in his own mysterious way and raises him up in glory; we Christians have no other voucher to guarantee our eschatological hope.

What of martyrdom? As Christians, we believe in life eternal through the Resurrection of Jesus. Within the Religious Conference we ask each institute to restudy the charism of its founders and its own history. In fact, every institute approved by the church as a way of sanctity has, explicitly or implicitly, a spirituality of martyrdom. Times of violence force us to rediscover the richness of these traditions. As one retreatant said, “A short time ago I made perpetual vows in my congregation ‘until death.’ Only now I understand what ‘until death’ may mean.” All Christians, by virtue of their baptism and confirmation, are to give testimony to their faith “until death.”

And yet a Christian spirituality of nonviolence flows only from an option that is free and personal. No one can be coerced—not even by religious obedience—to live nonviolently in situations of extreme violence. Nor is there permitted a type of brainwashing or of forced collective consciousness in the style of some cults or ideologies. Any genuine spirituality must be *chosen*, and only after serious reflection and prayer. This is all the more true of a Christian spirituality of nonviolence.

No one looks upon physical death as an end in itself: Our God is a God of life. As one priest, well tested by the realities I have described, told a group: “It’s easy to be killed. Any day I can join a protest, flaunt a terrorist order, denounce a public authority, and I will become the direct object of such threats.” In our Catholic tradition we remember the acts of the martyrs and the story of the sons of the Maccabees, who answered their persecutors with stirring words: “Killer, you take from us the present life, but the King of the World....will give us eternal life.” Yet our experience in Peru has been different. In all the testimonies we have shared, no one has said that she or he was ready to die for eternal life. But all have answered: “We will stay in our communities in service to our people.” “We will not abandon our people.” “We do not stay out of a whim to be martyrs, but to serve the people.”

In this secularist age, public authorities do not persecute religious beliefs as such. A Christian spirituality of nonviolence in service to the community is an even more valiant Christian testimony than that which seeks eternal life. “There is no love greater than this, to give one’s life for one’s friends.” During intense liturgies and during social hours of fun-sharing, the joyful and grateful enthusiasm of participants is a sign of the presence of the Spirit supporting their willingness to remain present to their people. Not martyrdom but service, if only the service of presence, is the purpose. “The ultimate norm [of a Christian spirituality] is the following of Christ as proposed in the Gospel. The following of [the nonviolent] Christ is the supreme rule.”

BURDENED WITH HISTORY

SOVIET CHURCHES & THE SEARCH FOR AUTHENTICITY

ANTHONY UGOLNIK

The truest view of what is happening in the Soviet Union today is gained from staring at the back of someone's head in a queue. Bone-weary and with fallen arches, most Russians are far removed from power and its sources in Moscow, as far removed as most of our sources of information about the USSR. No wonder we have little understanding of their real concerns and know so little of the profound spiritual and religious search now animating the Soviet Union.

As part of a scholars' exchange arranged through the associated Soviet church bodies and the National Council of Churches, this past year (September 1989-May 1990) I was the first American scholar to reside at the Theological Academy in Leningrad. This role entitled me to meals and a cot in a tiny room that I shared with a tall Ukrainian (Ukrainians constitute a solid majority of the divinity students in all "Russian" Orthodox seminaries). It also gave me access to a magnificent library of pre-1917 texts, a vantage point from which to view the new resurgence of religion in the USSR, and a place in a city perched on top of East Europe in this most tumultuous of years.

Theology and religious awareness have sprung up in the Soviet Union like a long-kept family secret—always there, but never acknowledged. For many years, American institutes of Slavic studies virtually overlooked religion and its role under socialism. To most Western Sovietologists, Orthodoxy remains a mystery. Yet now that the Soviets themselves have discovered the impoverishment of their ethics and of their imaginations, it is to Orthodoxy that they are turning.

Village priests are now baptizing hundreds of adults at a time. I myself served as an Orthodox deacon in Leningrad, where it was not unusual to baptize seventy-five to a hundred people on a Saturday. On visits there a decade ago, I could look down from the altar and see a sea of headscarves, an ocean of old women. Now young parents lift up their children to see over the heads of the crowd. Social science can analyze the phenomenon and its growth, but it is at a loss to explain the object of its attraction.

My project in Leningrad concentrated on analyzing the grow-

ing influence of the church in secular society—the arts, literature, and popular culture. Two themes emerged with astounding regularity: first, the theme of ruin. Like those Old English poems which lament the passing of a Roman-Celtic civilization that the Anglo-Saxons themselves had destroyed, a similar lament has seized the Slavs in the USSR for the spirit of Christian Rus' which the secular powers have almost crushed in their people. That lament leads directly to the second, compelling theme: that of a "lost faith."

On September 26, the Soviet Parliament wrote religious freedom into law. As theologians find a new audience, it is the materialists—the scientific rationalists and the Communist dialecticians—who complain of their own moral crisis. In a particularly poignant confession, an older woman from Smolensk who had been a party member her entire life confided to me, "All we hoped for, all we believed in, all we sacrificed for—were lies. *Mi poteryali svoyu veru.*" Her grandson was nestled in her lap, but her smile was bitter as her eyes looked from a richly etched face full of character, full of moral struggle: "...we have lost our faith."

It is this sense of tragedy, this defacement of human aspiration, which so many observers of the Soviet scene fail to discern. Instead, they see the long lines waiting in the stores and the imminent collapse which seems to hover over the Soviet economy, and they can't help suppressing a surge of Western triumphalism. It's a forgivable mistake. Human discomfort has been finely tuned in the USSR. Simple inconvenience has been carefully



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honed to an excruciating, exquisite perfection. Mail is lost, packages rifled and stolen, telegrams paid for but never delivered, dry-cleaning lifted. Clerks stash away goods in short supply and sell them later, from their own back doors, for inflated prices. Corruption infects virtually every transaction. But the explanation cannot stop at an indictment of this once stagnant but at least predictable economy. All sense of an ethos has dissipated any consensus on values, and in that gaping black hole the Soviet system seems to be falling in on itself.

The Orthodox tradition in Russia, Byelorussia, and the Ukraine—and I include the Eastern Rite or “Uniate” Catholics as a part of that tradition—is now reawakening within this atmosphere of lost faith and lamentation. By no means is its future success assured. The Communists, after all, have been startlingly effective in their eradication of religious awareness. While state-approved studies of religion were blundering, even stupid at times, they tended to monopolized religious discourse, convincing many Soviets who longed for religious belief that it could never be something they themselves would attain.

One young father, with a black T-shirt celebrating Heavy Metal and an earring peeking out from his longish hair, stopped me one evening after a service. He held out his infant daughter, swaddled tightly Russian-style and capped in white embroidery. The contrast between them was startling. So was his plea. “Father, please get her baptized,” he said. “I want to be a believer, but I can’t. They have killed it in me. For my daughter, there is hope.” In the United States, I teach at a tough-minded little bastion of the new secularism. “Belief” is rarely a matter of discussion. My students often profess to be believers, but they do not know precisely what they believe. Atheism has had the same effect on many Soviets: They do not know what it is, exactly, that they do not believe.

A thirst for novelty infects the faith crisis of rationalist materialism. TV hypnotists, UFO reports, and New Age ideas have invaded Soviet popular culture. Church weddings, too, have become the height of fashion. A friend of mine, a workout partner at the gym, asked me in April if I could arrange a church wedding for him and his bride. Neither of them is baptized.

“That’s impossible,” I said. “You’ve got to be believers to engage in a sacramental act.”

His response struck at the core of his assumptions. “But you’re my friend,” he said, “and you’re a deacon. I thought maybe we could come to some kind of mutual arrangement” (*blat*—the word “bribe” somehow doesn’t capture the fullness of the term). My friend’s cynicism was, in a way, innocent. He assumed that the church would operate according to his Soviet assumptions. He carried his assumptions too far, but his cynicism wasn’t totally without justification. The Russian Orthodox church is, after all, a profoundly Soviet institution. Stalin, when he so graciously suffered the church to exist in its present organizational form, reshaped the administration of a decimated body. Only three bishops had survived. Today, the hierarchy—and it is, like any hierarchy, profoundly political in its jockeying for power and privilege—is a Soviet product, and the church organ for dealing

with foreigners is state-conceived and state-influenced. The Department for External Church Relations is vastly unpopular among parish priests (its name, equally unwieldy in Russian, is simply shortened to “the Department”). The ecumenism it fosters is equally unpopular. “You must realize,” a young Ukrainian priest told me, “that the Department gave ecumenism a bad name over here. Ecumenism, to us, means haul out the cognac for another foreign delegation, and above all, smile and keep your mouth shut!”

An elaborate system of accountability, not likely to change under the new law, places government and church in constant contact, and contact elicits pressure. The present Orthodox hierarchy—the same bishops who have received the congratulations of the West for the new Orthodox awakening in the Soviet Union—are the very bishops who presided over the church’s long and often artificially induced sleep. They live well—as do their priests—and like officials in the Communist party, enjoy better accommodations, more money, and the same vested interest in a closed system.

The closed system thrives in the church, and *glasnost* has not touched the system of theological education. Individuals can be warm, gracious, helpful. Yet there is none of that openness of discussion, that willingness to entertain a question, which pervaded the Orthodox intellect at the end of the last century. Meaningful discussions take place only conspiratorially. The church’s lock-step, defensive stance, once a necessity for its survival, now threatens to keep it from thriving. The body, it is said, becomes comfortable within a coma. It requires laborious therapy to wake it up.

Some courageous Orthodox make an attempt at resuscitation. The results, however, can be tragic. Vocal critics of church-state collusion have been attacked by unidentified assailants in Moscow and Leningrad. Dressed in expensive Western jogging suits, these gangs are hardly impoverished thugs. Viktor Popov, a layman once imprisoned under Brezhnev but now active in Christian social action in Moscow, was badly beaten last December.

On September 8, 1990, a vicious attack shook the entire Russian church. Those who know the religious scene in Moscow have long looked to Father Alexander Menn as a voice for the future. A bold critic and charismatic speaker, Menn had begun appearing on Soviet media, preaching forcefully to the uncatechized. In a grisly but symbolic assault, an unknown assailant followed him on his way to church, and sliced through his skull with an ax. No money was taken. Like many converted priests from the intelligentsia, Menn was an ethnic Jew. The media here and in the USSR speculated that anti-Semites were to blame. Other possibilities, however, are more likely. The move to Russian Orthodoxy among Soviet Jews has, after all, been widespread. No others were the object of such attacks. Some church activists believe, rather, that Menn’s well-known objections to corruption in church-state contacts led to his martyrdom.

Corruption can flourish in a sovietized administration that keeps each organ of the institutionalized body isolated from all

the others. And the head can wear a golden crown while the limbs shiver in relative poverty. The newly elected Patriarch Alexei has had a favorable press in the West. With his imposing white beard and robes, his urbane and polished presence, he captures the affection of Western visitors. To his credit, as metropolitan of Leningrad he gave the church a more visible, active ministry. Yet he also maintained the grand style of his predecessors. In a society where public transport is crowded and overburdened, he glides to appointments in limousines. Where young couples wait up to twelve years for an apartment, he has a row of imposing residences. And where church members ache to shrug off state interference, he takes up added state appointments.

One example will suffice to show the contradictions in church administration. Just before Christmas 1989, at a convocation at the Leningrad Academy, I witnessed an American Lutheran bishop, the Reverend Lowell Knutsen, present a gift of some ten thousand Bibles to the Russian church on behalf of the Seattle-area Council of Churches. The much-prized Bibles were distributed to the student body, numbering several hundred, and Metropolitan Alexei was profuse in his thanks. But following the ceremony, the remaining books were spirited away to the basement. A few months later, the Bibles were showing up on the black market, selling for over a hundred roubles. (A pensioner doesn't earn a hundred roubles in three months.) In the past, the Orthodox and Baptists alike, caught in this practice of Bible-sales, have responded that for the church to survive it is necessary

to collect such funds. A percentage of the sales, however, remands to the state in taxes—a tax which sustains the very organs which up to now have monitored and regulated the church.

Thus the dilemma of modern Orthodoxy in Russia rests upon a paradox. People flock to this church in a quest to return to traditional Russian values (even rock lyrics, vibrating with Heavy Metal amplification, thank the church for its perseverance), yet those who administer the church are still deeply affected, even shaped, by the Soviet system from which the new converts seek a remedy.

The church is not yet ready to meet its new challenge. It has not looked to its real resources. Like the Soviet system itself, the church is laden with bureaucracy. Its clerics are much more comfortable with the old church—the determined, respectful, adulatory, and grandmotherly *babushkas*—than they are with the youth (whom they largely ignore), their bold new converts, or the even bolder dissidents now released from jail. I do not mean to suggest that dissent is a badge of competence. (Some former dissidents have submitted to the temptation of empire-building, and some have shown a conservatism that is comfortable with intolerance.) But among these people there lies a talent which the church has yet to tap.

The "sovietized" church is afraid of its laity. (Russian Orthodoxy's attitude toward women, so often cited in the West, must be understood as part of this larger problem.) It is in the laity that the real future of Orthodoxy lies. Only here will the Russian church find release from "sovietization."

A FARSIGHTED GIFT

The envelope enclosed in this issue of COMMONWEAL will speed your gift.

Christian academics in the West sometimes fall victim to the same mistakes as secular Sovietologists. We look at the bitter struggles between Uniates (those who seek to retain their Eastern liturgy and practice under the jurisdiction of Rome) and the Orthodox as manifestations of “nationalism.” We tend to see the rift between the Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox—particularly the struggle of the latter for an independent, autocephalous jurisdiction—in the same light. It is more profound than that.

Ukrainians constitute a plurality, if not a majority, among Slavic Orthodox Christians in the USSR. In the former, *glasnost* order, seminaries were far more likely to admit pliant village boys from the Ukraine than troublesome urban intellectuals. Now they are paying the price. These “down-home boys” turned out to be far less tractable than anticipated. They were quick to recognize the “sovietization” of the Orthodox church, and they have rejected it with a fury that is likely to alter its future.

Spiritually and intellectually, the Ukraine has been a constant link between East and West. Yet both the Ukrainian Orthodox and Eastern Rite Ukrainian Catholics have suffered a cruel irony. Dominated by Russian Orthodox centralism in the East and Roman centralism in the West, both have been marginalized by the communities with whom they share faith and tradition. Victims of their critics’ own nationalism, both Ukrainian Orthodox and Eastern Rite Ukrainians are persistently accused of “nationalism” by those who have denied them an identity. Thus both the Orthodox and Catholic communities here and abroad tend to perceive the 50 million Ukrainians as “nationalists” the very moment they refer to themselves as Ukrainians.

The Ukrainian intellect has been vastly underestimated. In America, most Christians approach the insights of Orthodoxy among Slavs as specifically “Russian.” Yet most Slavic Orthodox in America originated far west of Russia. Their native traditions were sometimes suppressed, however, by Russian leaders. In the U.S., Ukrainian Eastern Rite Catholics have been forced by Rome to accept a celibate priesthood and Western “biritual” priests, as well as Roman (meaning, in America, Irish or Italian) devotions. In some of my own writing I have been guilty of dealing with Ukrainians as a function of somebody else. My experience in the Soviet Union helped to correct that. Much of the energy within the church in Eastern Europe—both Catholic and Orthodox—springs from the Ukraine.

The Ukrainian mind is now struggling to shrug off the heavy, dead weight of the Soviet imposition upon the churches. Always intellectually engaged with the West, and always suffering under the Russian Orthodox impulse to reject all Western influence, the Orthodox church in the Ukraine seeks not only national or political independence but the respiritualization of personhood. If the “person” is communal in essence—as opposed to the isolating emphasis placed on the “individual” in the West—then the restoration of faith is a part of the restoration of the community.

The resurgence of “nationalism” in the USSR is a function of a broader, essentially metaphysical movement. Under the Soviet system, people found themselves defined in terms of their

social function. Now they long for a relational identity, an identity rooted in the consubstantiality of the Trinity itself. In the Uniate (Catholic) movement centered in the Ukrainian city of Lviv, and the autocephalous (Ukrainian) Orthodoxy centered in the same city (Lviv became Soviet only after World War II), clergy follow the lead of the laity in this quest. The Russian Orthodox, however, dominated by their clergy, suffer a profound inertia. Like any *nomenklatura*, they can only be moved from below.

Much has been made by non-Ukrainians of the intense conflict between Eastern Catholic and Orthodox Christians in the Ukraine. (In late August, the *New York Times* reported a “religious war” between the two.) The conflict is undeniable and has already threatened many an ecumenical conversation between Orthodox and Catholics in the U.S. and Canada. Yet the fact is these are two wings of the same intellectual movement. Until 1686, Kiev had its own independent episcopal see. In that year, the Ukraine’s religious identity was split by two forces. In the east, Ukrainian Orthodoxy was subjugated to Moscow, which suppressed Kiev’s episcopal independence, destroyed its presses, and Russified its thinking. In the West, in 1596, the Catholic overlords of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth imposed a union with Rome on their Ukrainian Orthodox subjects. They uncharacteristically respected the Ukrainian identity of their new subjects, however, and restored their religious organization. But, in 1686, Poland entered into an ill-named “Treaty of Eternal Peace” with Russia, which severed the Ukraine into “Catholic” and “Orthodox” halves. Over the span of centuries, a process of Romanization subsequently impeded the free flow and development of the authentically Ukrainian tradition.

What is happening today in the Western Ukraine—in those provinces which were free of Soviet antireligious terror before the war—is that an effort is being made to restore this ancient, independent Ukrainian mind set. Misinterpreted, even trivialized in the media, the religious turmoil there cannot be understood as simply a “nationalist” movement. It is a manifestation of the hunger for holiness—widespread throughout the Soviet Union—a hunger which finds its inspiration deeply rooted in ancient Kiev. The rush to Rome now taking place in the western provinces of the Ukraine is actually a rush away from Moscow, which suppressed (and would still suppress, if it could) the Eastern Rite Ukrainian Catholics with the help of the Russian Orthodox hierarchy. But we must not mistake this antipathy as a merely historical resentment. That resentment is seated in the contemporary corruption and arrogance of the Russian Orthodox hierarchs who still serve in the Ukraine.

Paralleling the rush back to Rome is a drive for an independent Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox church. This movement was initiated in October 1989 by Archbishop Ioan Bodnarchuk in Lviv. It has grown quickly, and in unexpected ways. On June 6, 1990, an assembly in Kiev of seven bishops, 300 clergy, and a large number of laity elected Metropolitan Mstyslav as patriarch. An astute, ninety-three-year-old Ukrainian then serving as bishop in the United States (and representing the vast majority of exiled Ukrainian Orthodox), Mstyslav has fought for recognition of his autocephalous Ukrainian movement among other Orthodox in the West. It was to him that the Ukrainians turned in an effort

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to revitalize the ancient patriarchate in Kiev.

Mstyslav's appointment has reawakened old controversies about the canonical status of his movement. Ukrainians express a longing for an unambiguously recognized yet independent Ukrainian Orthodoxy. By and large, however, the Orthodox world has not recognized the plea to restore their ancient status. There are new movements, however, toward conciliation. In July, the large Ukrainian Orthodox community in Canada won canonical recognition from the ecumenical patriarch in Constantinople. Bishop Vsevolod, primate of a Ukrainian diocese in America under the ecumenical patriarch, expresses hope for canonical acceptance of all Ukrainians in the homeland and abroad, and has broken new ground in communicating with Ukrainian Catholics.

Above all, however, Mstyslav's choice was an embarrassment for the newly elected patriarch of Moscow, and Moscow can be expected to resist this growing independent Orthodox movement. Strategically, this resistance serves Moscow's desire to maintain central control over Orthodoxy in the rapidly changing USSR. Yet there is an irony in this resistance. As long as the patriarch of Moscow suppresses the restoration of an independent Kievan patriarchate, he also assures the continued growth of the Eastern Rite Catholic movement, a movement unhindered by the civil government since last year's meeting between Mikhail Gorbachev and Pope John Paul II. Thus the patriarchate of Moscow seems willing to preside over a shrunken Orthodoxy in its western eparchies rather than witness the growth of a neighboring Ukrainian Orthodox patriarchate.

In the dark days of the seventies, scholars in the Soviet Union like Dmitri Lichachev and Sergei Ivarantsev used to pack lecture halls with their impassioned analyses of ancient Rus and classical Byzantium. Today, the historical insights of these lay scholars challenge the best Orthodox seminary students. These scholars and others like them—historians, archeologists, students of architecture and philosophy—refused to deny the power of their religious beliefs. In their penetration of the spirit of prerevolutionary Russia, they have asserted what we in the West have forgotten: that culture must express a common life, a shared soul.

Even the secular establishment in the Soviet Union is taken up, at unguarded moments, with this new spiritual self-assertion. Last year, for example, the literary critic Konstantin Kedrov published *The Poetic Cosmos*, a creative and restless exposition of Russian literary history through the analogue of the stars and constellations. It is the book of a believer and it violates virtually every assumption of the traditional Marxist literary establishment. Already, there are new Solovyovs, new Florenskys, struggling to be born.

Vladimir Poresh in Leningrad is another example of the energy and creative intellect in Orthodoxy. With an exciting, well-edited journal called *Amin*, produced in pitifully small quantities in carbon copy, this former political prisoner now renounces any political ambitions and fosters a dialogue between believers and nonbelievers on fundamental questions of ethics and values. "That grand structure of Russian culture, based upon a real moral

vision, has been destroyed, ruined, utterly lost," he insists. "The tragedy is that the very ethical sense upon which it was built has been ruined for us. We no longer know how to build a culture, Christian or otherwise. We must study our own lost canon, simply to reawaken the capacity in us to conceive a vision. We must learn, once more, how to see." I worked with Poresh and his friend, the Leningrad philosopher Konstantin Ivanov, for the Society for an Open Christianity. It strives to feed the hunger of the masses of young people who come to the church, are baptized, and then find no one to meet their spiritual or intellectual needs.

There are new theological insights in Russia, Byelorussia, and the Ukraine which can help shape the way we in the West look at the world. We would do well to engage them. For while we Westerners have the freedom to engage each other and to publish—a freedom for which they have so ardently longed—they have an abundance of spiritual energy which we crave. In their "lost faith" and "lamentation" we may find a quality we too would like to instill in our nation—a hunger for the holy. □

STAGE

LOVE & DEATH

'FALSETTOLAND' & 'ISLAND'

came to Falsettoland late. I missed the first two installments of William Finn's "Marvin Trilogy"—*In Trousers* (1978), *March of the Falsettos* (1980)—in which, presumably to chipper music (I am judging by the score of *Falsettoland*), the titular hero sorted out his confusion about his hetero- and his homosexuality. When last we saw Marvin, as the radio soaps used to say, he had left his wife (Trina) and child (Jason) for his male lover (Whizzer); had lost his psychiatrist (Mendel), who married Trina; and lost Whizzer as well, leaving him alone to explore the possibility of a father-son relationship with Jason, who—as these things go in light fiction—had begun to adjust to his father's sexual orientation, to understand that homosexuality is neither inherited nor catching. All that was a decade ago, however, and in *Falsettoland*, Finn (with James Lapine again as coauthor) has to carry his cheerful celebration of gay-acceptance into the age of AIDS.

All the characters from *March* are back in *Falsettoland*, and they have been joined by a lesbian couple—a doctor and a would-be caterer (an excuse for food jokes). Marvin and Whizzer have found each other again, and at first it looks as though the musical will be about two gay couples and their happy integration with a straight family; Whizzer has become a kind of third father to Jason. The only problem on the horizon is Jason's impending bar mitzvah, an occasion for Jewish jokes (there is—somewhat extraneously—a number about the ineptness of Jewish boys at baseball) and for parental attempts to be understanding and dictatorial at the same time. The play is set in 1981-82, but Finn and Lapine and the audience are looking back on those years

across a decade of deaths. The script begins to darken—or begins to mix dark elements in its sprightliness—when the doctor and her lover sing “Something bad is happening,” in which an undefined disease has begun to make its dangerous presence visible. When the unbeatable Whizzer stumbles at racketball and then takes to his bed, the audience knows what is happening even if the characters do not. Since maturation plays customarily involve the death of a loved one, the musical’s sad/happy ending has Jason bring his bar mitzvah to Whizzer’s hospital room, at once a farewell, a beginning, and a testimony to the play’s extended family. At the end, the performers repeat “Falsettoland,” the song that opened the show so joyously, but Mendel’s final “Welcome to Falsettoland” is painfully ironic, the show’s recognition of what the audience knows outside the theater and what the characters are just beginning to understand.

Some of the performers—like the characters—have returned from the 1980 show. Michael Rupert and Stephen Bogardus are once again Marvin and Whizzer, and Chip Zien repeated his role as Mendel, although Lonny Price, whom I saw, replaced him when the musical moved from Playwrights Horizon to the Lucille Lortel, the larger off-Broadway house where it is still running. The cast is a solid one—good voices, a great deal of energy—but they do seem to be working very hard to pump-up the material. Despite the effectiveness of the last moment, *Falsettoland* is a very fragile show, carried less by what it gives the audience than by what the audience brings into the theater.

Another small musical from Playwrights Horizon that has reached out to a larger audience—on Broadway, this time—is *Once on This Island* by Stephen Flaherty (music) and Lynn Ahrens (book and lyrics). The island is in the French Antilles, and the story being told there—based on Rosa Guy’s novel, *My Love, My Love*—is of Ti Moune, a little girl who miraculously survives a storm and grows up thinking that she has been marked as special by the gods, with a destiny grander than the peasant village in which she has been raised by the couple who rescued her. Destiny arrives in the person of Armand, one of the ruling elite of the island, and through the device of an automobile wreck (another storm) that nearly kills him. Ti Moune keeps him alive and then follows him to his mansion, becoming his mistress and completing his cure through her love. Class differences triumph, however, and he marries a Paris-educated woman in his own set. Heartbroken, Ti Moune wanders off, dies, and turns into a tree. Happy ending in story time: another Ti Moune and another Armand, of whatever name, meet at the tree and marry across class. In the long run, Erzulie, Goddess of Love, wins over Papa Ge, Demon of Death.

Once on This Island is essentially a folk tale, sung and danced by eleven performers who act as the storytellers and become characters when they are needed. It is all played against Loy Arcenas’s childlike sets. The production is supposed to suggest the simplicity of the folk genre, but it is too obviously working to fulfill that suggestion. The music is as amiable as the story and the performers appealing, but the choreography by Graciela Daniele, who also directed, is as tedious as the dances she did

for *Dangerous Games*. I kept wishing they would stop the all-purpose undulation and let the simple story be simply told and sung.

GERALD WEALES

SCREEN

SUNNY & CLAUS

'REVERSAL OF FORTUNE' & 'HUNTER'

Adapting a gimmick from *Sunset Boulevard* (William Holden’s corpse explaining the events leading up to Holden’s murder), *Reversal of Fortune* begins in the hospital room of Sunny von Bülow, a Newport socialite rendered brain dead by an overdose of insulin. Speaking from some mental limbo (I presume), Sunny’s voice poses the central question of the movie: who administered the drug and under what circumstances? Two of Sunny’s children accuse their stepfather Claus of attempted murder for money. But Claus insists that Sunny was self-destructive enough to overdose herself, and that the guilty verdict of his initial trial resulted from a frame-up. Sunny tells us that we will watch the course of von Bülow’s efforts to clear himself, and then...“You tell me...” if Claus is guilty or not. But to do that we need one or the other or both of two kinds of information: the physical, circumstantial evidence that convicts or acquits people in court; and/or the psychological information that any good novelist or dramatist gives us, the nonverifiable evidence that acquits or convicts the characters in our hearts. *Reversal of Fortune* conveys little of either sort of knowledge. The ambiguities of innocence and guilt may seem to be the subject of this movie, but its creators really have other things on their minds.

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To be sure, after lawyer Alan Dershowitz (well played by Ron Silver) takes the case, he and his battery of student assistants vow to destroy the validity of every bit of evidence the State of Rhode Island had used to convict their client. Some of this evidence is adduced on screen, but little of it is discussed or visualized with the lucidity or the suspenseful sense of point-counterpoint needed to make it or its validation fascinating to a lay audience. (See *Anatomy of a Murder* for a superb example of how a movie can succeed in making legal tactics both clear and dramatic.) In actuality, the turning point in the von Bülow case was effected in a chemistry lab. In the movie, two legal assistants race on screen and breathlessly announce the news. But director Barbet Schroeder does not lead up to the news in any suspenseful way, does not shape his narrative in such a manner that we greet the laboratory analysis with some of the excitement that the lawyers feel. To understand clearly how Dershowitz assembled and executed his defense, I guess we'll have to read his book, on which the Nicholas Kazan script is based.

But that's not the only way this movie serves Alan Dershowitz. Does anyone in the audience have reservations about a busy *pro bono*, civil libertarian lawyer taking on the case of such an egregious overdog as Claus von Bülow? Don't worry: the movie proceeds to steamroll those doubts out of existence. Dershowitz is approached to take the case while he is agonizing over the fate of two innocent clients, and throughout the course of the movie we are reminded that the large fee he collects from Claus will finance their defense and those of other legal victims. Does one of Dershowitz's idealistic aides nevertheless denounce her mentor for selling out? She (and we) are overwhelmed by his rebuttal that the defense of von Bülow is a major civil libertarian blow struck on behalf of rich and poor alike. Can workaholic Alan be a good father to his apparently motherless son? The lad—a legal groupie if there ever was one—follows his father about with shining eyes and offers his dad wholehearted support at every turn of the case. Does an ex-girlfriend now contributing to the defense accuse Dershowitz of dismissing her ideas for emotional reasons? Dershowitz denies this and who are we going to believe, the rather dour actress who plays the assistant as a grievance-collector or regular-guy-only-with-brains Ron Silver? *Reversal of Fortune* may be cloudy as drama and as legal explanation, but it's a bodacious bit of hagiography.

Does this picture provide any pleasure for anyone other than Alan Dershowitz? Indeed, it does. At its best, *Reversal of Fortune* is an expensive-looking, competently directed, well-acted guilty pleasure. The hearts of the filmmakers are not in the scenes of legal strategy but in the flashbacks to the von Bülows' marital warfare. If you've ever wanted to spy on the decadent rich, gape at the spacious luxury of Newport mansions, hear a quietly seething millionairess calmly urge her husband to fill his empty evening with a visit to his mistress—only to have him reply with elegant insouciance, "I doubt if she'll be in on a Saturday night"—then hasten to *Reversal of Fortune*.

Jeremy Irons's virtuosic performance of Claus sounds the keynote of the movie. Glenn Close does her best with Sunny, but the character spends so much of her time nagging or drugged that the audience's attention would shift to Irons even if his per-

formance were lousy. Which, to say the least, it is not.

In his first substantial scene, Irons enters a living room to greet his future attorney. The salutation, as written, is, "Ah, Alan...." But what we actually hear is, "Ah, Ah lahhnnnnnn...." I thought to myself, "No, this can't possibly work. It's a cartoon. It won't sustain a two-hour movie."

How wrong I was and how right, Irons's performance is indeed a caricature, a cartoon. But it is a hugely absorbing, even spell-binding cartoon. And it certainly sustains the entertaining but superficial approach Kazan and Schroeder take to their grim subject matter. Irons doesn't give us a portrait in depth, but what would this movie do with a portrait-in-depth? Schroeder and company aren't exploring decadence or showing how wealth and leisure bring out the poison in conjugal partners. The marital quarrels are played for nasty laughs and Irons makes us chuckle at the squirmings of an elegant scoundrel. In his mouth the vowel A becomes a long, shuddering yawn, the N's are lingering sneers, and the S's could be the sibilants of a cultured, reasonable serpent (and maybe they are). With these sounds in his arsenal, imagine what Irons does with the line, "Ah...my prawns," when von Bülow is served his favorite seafood.

In one scene, Dershowitz stands on a sidewalk talking to his client who is seated in a limo. Von Bülow's face is partially obscured by the darkness of the car's curtained interior. The lawyer remarks, "You're a very strange man." Replies von Bülow in his British-Teutonic accent from hell: "You have no idea." And the car drives off. In another movie, that line might have provoked faint shudders in viewers. The audience I was in giggled, a collective giggle that had a note of relief in it. If monsters are this amusing, why fuss about innocence or guilt? Jeremy Irons's Claus von Bülow is simply the latest addition to that portrait gallery of which Erich von Stroheim is the eternal curator: The Men You Love to Hate.

By the time this issue of *Commonweal* reaches readers, *White Hunter, Black Heart* will have disappeared from most theaters. For now I will only say that I found it, for all its minor and easily spotted flaws, an exciting, muscularly filmed, *thoroughly dramatized* work. The italicized words indicate what sets Clint Eastwood's adaptation of Peter Viertel's novel apart from and above most of the American movies released this year. Instead of drowning his theme in effects (technical wizardry, violence, sex shocks, sick jokes) the way most directors do these days, Eastwood tenaciously and subtly pursues it, scene after scene, until it bears fruit in a believable and tragic climax. And what is that theme? The self-deceiving nature of the Hemingwayesque artist (in this case a film director modeled on John Huston) who is liberal and macho, democratic and antiracist in his ideas, condescending and destructive in his practice. Yes, our leading macho-man movie star, Dirty Harry himself, has made the best antimachismo film I have ever seen. And it's this film that has been savaged or ignored by (mostly) liberal critics who have spent half their working lives indicting Clint Eastwood as the spiritual heir of Attila the Hun. Talk about reversals of fortune!

RICHARD ALLEVA

Engaging testimony, unconvincing argument

Reading *No Turning Back*, a sort of two-person autobiography, teaches me that it's possible to finish such a book admiring its authors and unhappy with their product. Barbara Ferraro and Pat Hussey have a good story to tell, and they do it well. The use to which they put the story is another matter.

The book tells of two bright, strong, committed Catholic women who became nuns, were educated and served as nuns, got in trouble as nuns, and finally quit, under very considerable direct pressure (despite their obscure status) from very lofty circles of the Vatican. No doubt the skillfulness of the telling owes something to the help of professional writer Jane O'Reilly, but she could not have endowed the authors with the wit and warmth that come through on many pages. Moreover, the story rings basically true to my own experience as a one-time religious, as a lay Catholic exposed at times to the threat and reality of church discipline, and as an editor privileged to work, during the conciliar years, with movers and shakers of women's religious orders.

At the outset of the story as it is told here, it is 1986; Ferraro, then forty-two, and Hussey, thirty-six, both Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, are among the still unrepentant signers of an ad that ran in the *New York Times* in October 1984, and soon thereafter drew letters of reprimand from the Vatican's Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (CRSI). The ad headlined the assertion that "A Diversity of Opinions About Abortion Exists Among Committed Catholics." Largely on the basis of that contention, it asked for open discussion on the issue among Catholics, free of any threat of ecclesiastical sanctions against politicians and church personnel; it also argued against seeking "legislation

NO TURNING BACK

Two Nuns' Battle with the Vatican over Women's Right to Choose

Barbara Ferraro and Patricia Hussey with Jane O'Reilly

Poseidon Press, New York, \$19.95, 332 pp.

Robert G. Hoyt

that curtails the legitimate exercise of freedom of religion and conscience or discriminates against poor women." The ad bore ninety-seven signatures, those of two priests, two religious brothers, twenty-six nuns, the rest lay persons.

In 1986, Ferraro and Hussey are the only two of the original nun-signers whose "cases" have not been "cleared" by the CRSI. They are about to meet with a high-ranking Vatican delegation for what the then papal nuncio to the U.S., Archbishop Pio Laghi, says will be a pastoral session, a dialogue, not a juridical meeting nor an inquisition—except that Laghi adds: "But I must insist that after our time together you must put in writing that you support and adhere to the Roman Catholic teaching on abortion." To Ferraro, as she says to the archbishop, this does not sound like dialogue. They are offered a model, a statement drafted and signed by six Sisters of Loretto which satisfied the CRSI even though, if read closely, it neither retracts the central assertions of the original ad nor makes the affirmation being asked of Ferraro and Hussey. They refuse to sign anything, and are given a fortnight to come up with an acceptable statement, on pain of dismissal. The deadline, and two more years, pass, and the threat is never carried out. But in July 1988, faced with criticism from within their order and from other nuns and apprised of Vatican moves to tighten control over church personnel, they resign, but continue, as lay women, to operate a

multifaceted work of service and advocacy on behalf of poor people in West Virginia.

The battle Hussey and Ferraro fought over the *Times* ad, though reported with economy, constitutes the core of the book. Readers who come to this work for other reasons will learn a lot about the maturation of individual nuns and whole congregations before, during, and after Vatican II. The material is interesting, even beguiling, and historically valuable. But all this is context; the aim of the book, the reason it was created, was to demonstrate that the Catholic church remains an authoritarian and deeply patriarchal institution; that it is coercive, even violent, in its methods of enforcing its teaching; and, most centrally, that it is wrong about abortion.

It's not news that the church is patriarchal and authoritarian. "Violent" seems hyperbolic. The word "coercive" in this setting raises endlessly arguable intra-ecclesial questions about the import of religious vows and the church's right to require silence or conformity from persons who are seen to speak on its behalf. If not coercive, however, the methods used in this instance by Vatican authorities seem to have been clearly disingenuous; it was not the substance but the appearance of unity that was sought, and if that required the nuns to say what the Vatican knew they did not believe, that was no problem.

But, "wrong about abortion?" Not shown. Not even argued. At one point, the book lists questions put to Ferraro and Hussey by the order's governing group, among them: "Are you saying that a woman should not be hampered by law from having an abortion? Or, Do you recognize any objective moral norms which would guide her decision?" Though Ferraro acknowledges that these are "good questions," the two did not answer at the time, on the ground that they were not given enough

time. But the book (published this year) still doesn't answer the questions straightforwardly. One has to dig to learn the authors' position. One place where it can be found is in the reaction of the two to a letter from a member of the congregation's governing group, Elizabeth Bowyer, expressing a sense that the two dissenters are now defending abortion as such. "It is important that we talk about this. If an SND [Sister of Notre Dame de Namur] were making public statements defending nuclear warfare or apartheid, I would feel that we would have a serious responsibility to ask for clarification and to question how these statements fit into our shared mission as SNDs." Ferraro's response-of-the-moment is then reported: "How can anyone equate defending women as moral agents and responsible decision-makers with defending apartheid and nuclear war? I don't know, Pat, I'm beginning to think that the Notre Dames are so out of touch with the status of women that they are incapable of understanding us."

The stance taken here is consistent with the rest of the book. What is to be said about it? First, that the status of women in society, particularly but not exclusively poor women, is indeed one of relative powerlessness, so that women disproportionately bear the burdens of pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing, often in circumstances not of their own making that multiply the burdens, to the point of putting health, sanity, life at risk. Second, that the status of women in the Catholic church is one of virtual exclusion from power, including the power to participate in the formulation of Catholic moral teaching. Third, that although these facts about the status of women are ethically relevant, they do not provide an answer to the question of what happens in an abortion.

As for Ferraro's analogy, it can be stood on its head. We do not judge apartheid and nuclear warfare evil because they are all but exclusively male inventions, products of a patriarchal system, but because of what they do and are. We may not judge abortion good in itself or ethically neutral because it sometimes, often, functions as a means of escape from privations or sufferings ultimately rooted in patriarchal domination. Apartheid cruelly oppresses people of color because they are colored. Nuclear weapons

kill or maim or poison every person within their considerable reach in space and time. And every induced abortion, properly so called, kills a fetus. To say this is not to end the argument. To deny it any real moral weight, on the ground that Tertullian hated women, Augustine hated sex, Thomas Aquinas defined women as malformed males, and the Roman curia is exclusively male, is to be less than serious. It might be different (and the book might require a different reviewer) had the authors answered Elizabeth Bowyer in terms of a coherent moral system distinguishable from the rhetoric of NOW and NARAL. They didn't.

Some things have to be added. First, that the Catholic church is also less than serious in its efforts to recognize, much less do something about, the status of

women within and outside the church, and to address the other cultural and systemic causes or occasions of abortion. The Vatican's response to the *Times* ad is a case in point: The amount of effort spent and ink spilled in trying to make the signers knuckle under suggests misplaced priorities, greater concern for keeping the troops in line than for the substance of the problem. (Moreover, the paternalistic, not to say hamhanded, handling of the case will prove counterproductive; whatever its flaws, for example, this book is *effective*.) Finally, though contemporary research tends overall to confirm the fetus's claim to human dignity, some results appear to call for honest debate about the status of the conceptus in the earliest stages of pregnancy. One hopes this debate will not be squelched. □

THEOLOGIAN AT WORK

THEOLOGY AND CHURCH

Walter Kasper

Crossroad, \$18.95, 231 pp.

Robert P. Imbelli

Walter Kasper, the new Catholic bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart, was for many years professor of systematic theology in the University of Tübingen. He thus represents the continuing influence of the Tübingen School of Catholic Theology, whose great nineteenth-century standard-bearers offered an alternative to that century's dominant neoscholasticism with its lack of historical sense and its almost total divorce from the intellectual life of its time. Kasper is inspired by the Tübingen tradition in elaborating a theological vision and program that is ample and unthreatened by modern developments in philosophy and the sciences. Rooted in the great tradition of the church Catholic, he can welcome and embrace every hard-won intimation of truth, whatever its source.

In his most recent collection of essays, titled *Theology and Church*, Kasper shows himself a passionate partisan of Vatican II. In the important essay on "The Continuing Challenge of Vatican II," he minces no words. "The church can therefore only move into the future on the basis of the last council's resolutions, and by implementing them conscientiously." Any attempt to "restore" things to a preconiliar state "would plunge the church into a foundational crisis compared with which the present state of affairs is a trifle."

The book's introduction, "Systematic Theology Today and the Tasks Before It," is timely. In the spirit of the Tübingen School, Kasper presents an understanding of the theologian's vocation that is fully ecclesial, but not narrowly ecclesiastical. Theology is no neutral discipline. It is undertaken within the community of faith and strives to serve the life of that community, "the living process of tradition and communication, in which the one gospel of Jesus Christ is interpreted and actualized." At the same time, theology articulates the critical and constructive moment of the community's life, as it seeks to give

an account of its hope not only to itself, but also to the cultural and social context in which it is immersed and to which it must serve as sacrament of salvation.

As member of the community, the theologian is bound to the life and worship of the community and to its hierarchical leadership. However, as responsible mediator between the Christian faith and its cultural context, the theologian must be more than a catechist or a mere ancillary of the church's magisterium. He or she is also bound by the critical canons of theological research and, most especially, by the unique requirements of the transcendent subject of its reflection: the God of Jesus Christ. Hence Kasper can assert: "In this living interpretation of tradition, theology has an important, relatively independent function within the church." The result is not a simplistic and reductionistic understanding of the theological task, but a complex and nuanced one. Tension will not be lacking; but, if lived out faithfully and patiently within the communion of the whole church, it can be the life-promoting tension that propels the pilgrim people forward on its journey of faith.

A perspicuous example of the generous catholicity that marks these essays is the treatment Kasper accords the late Karl Rahner. He honors Rahner as the theologian who, above all, fostered Catholic theology's confrontation with modernity. In the essay "Christology and Anthropology," Kasper endorses Rahner's "turn to the subject" in Catholic theology and his retrieval of the anthropological dimension of theological reflection: an imperative from both a theoretical and pastoral standpoint. Theoretically, Rahner's accomplishment signaled a much-delayed coming to terms with the Enlightenment's focus upon the human subject as a critical starting point for the reflective task. Pastorally, it concentrated once again upon the salvific import of theology's symbols and statements, liberating them from a desiccated dogmatism. It was, after all, "for us and our salvation" that the Word was made flesh.

Yet, for all his genuine appreciation of Rahner, Kasper is not simply a Rahnerian. In these essays, as in his masterful book, *The God of Jesus Christ*, Kasper pays Rahner the fine homage of

respectful critique. He has several times referred to his own theological enterprise with the seemingly redundant phrase: a "theological theology"; or, in other places, a "doxological theology." He insists that, beginning with the self-transcending subject, theology must move to the affirmation of the transcendent God; and that this "movement" originates in the church's worship and culminates in the worshipful praise of the Triune God in whom we live and move and have our being. In Kasper's distinctive synthesis, both the Catholic Karl Rahner and the Protestant Karl Barth receive grateful due and compliment one another.

Kasper's theology, with its sensitivity to the action of the Holy Spirit in the church and in the world, has always emphasized the transformative thrust of Christian existence. In the present work this sensitivity is further refined through the adoption of the classic tripartite schema of affirmation, negation, and analogical recapitulation. Thus in the essay "Autonomy and Theonomy," he speaks of the need to move beyond both a "restoration" model that is closed in principle to the aspirations of modernity and a "progressive" model that uncritically canonizes them. He opts, instead, for a "correlation and analogy" model that affirms the aspirations, negates their idolatrous overlay, and proclaims the transforming gospel of grace.

Not surprisingly, the logic of this "correlation and analogy" perspective is a "Christo-logic." Thus the two Christological essays—"Christology and Anthropology" and "One of the Trinity..."—provide the volume's center of gravity. The earlier anthropological essays lead up to them; the essays on church flow from them. There is, in Kasper's view, a "Christological determination" both of human nature and of ecclesial reality.

Kasper will typically begin his exposition by underscoring the dignity and grandeur of the human formed to God's image. Human freedom and autonomy provide the very condition for a responsible hearing and doing of the Word. There is, assuredly, an original blessing enshrined in creation, which ever proceeds from God through the Word and in the Spirit. It is this "Wisdom" orientation that is so characteristic of the theology of

Rahner, endowing it with such energizing scope.

Not only grace, however, but also sin is ingredient to the human condition. The gospel is both promise and judgment; revelation of the truth and unmasking of the lie. Hence, the theology of the cross must remain central to any reconsideration of Christology. Here Barth's insistence receives careful attention.

Kasper takes his cue from Paul in Romans 5 to celebrate the Christological "much more." The grace of the new Adam far exceeds the transgression of the old. Not only has the image been restored, it has been brought to surpassing fullness. Kasper does not hesitate to employ the classic patristic language of "divinization"; but he exegetes it in the more contemporary idiom of freedom. However, the freedom in question is no simple return to autonomy. It is the revelation of that new and definitive freedom bestowed by the Spirit, whose horizon is unlimited Love and whose end is human transformation in Christ. To quote, with Kasper, the patristic author with whom he has special affinity, Irenaeus of Lyons: "Christ has brought everything new by bringing himself, as he was promised. For this is what was proclaimed: that the new should come in order to renew men and women and make them live."

One must be grateful to the publisher for making these fine essays available to an English-speaking audience, in a generally reliable and fluent translation. My sole regret is the omission, from the present volume, of several important essays on Catholic theological hermeneutics which comprised "Part One" of the German original. In these crucial times for Catholic theology one needs all the illumination and guidance one can obtain. Kasper's writings are such an illuminating guide. □

REVIEWERS

ROBERT G. HOYT, *senior writer at Commonweal, has been editor of National Catholic Reporter, American Report, and Christianity and Crisis.*

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CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 738)

a worthy occupation. More importantly, Marget fails to appreciate the extreme sense of affliction, and even physical illness, which comes from the contemplative's experience of separation from God. In our opinion, Marget misinterprets Raïssa's mystical language as expressing a "death wish" and her behavior as that of a hypochondriac.

Quite to the contrary of Marget's conclusion that Raïssa's experience was "too private—too limited to serve as example or inspiration," we find that Raïssa's enviable productivity in a life devoted to contemplation makes her a truly "exceptional" person and proves that a life of contemplation can be followed in our times.

PIERRE L'ABBE

Co-signers of this letter are Barbara Amodio, Wilton, Conn.; Bernard Doering, Notre Dame, Ind.; John Dunaway, Macon, Ga.; and Matthew Mancini, Houston, Tex.

The author replies:

Judith Suther's book is—as I hope my review made clear—well-written, careful, and interesting. Because I met Raïssa Maritain in its pages I came to the subject with, I think, an open mind, and formed

my opinions on the basis of the presentation offered me. L'Abbé, Amodio, Doering, Dunaway, and Mancini are incorrect about my prejudices. I have great respect for people inclined and impelled toward prayer, and I do not believe women more than men should occupy themselves with domestic detail.

Simon misunderstood my statement about Véra. In comparing her with her sister I meant only to say that Véra's virtue was more apparent to me than Raïssa's. Suther's thesis is that Raïssa's earthly achievements, including her writing, have meaning only within the context of her spiritual ones, and she failed to persuade me of the latter's reality. It is true that I most appreciate actions undertaken for the direct, concrete benefit of other people, and that—from Suther's description—I understand Jacques and Véra to have met this criterion more than Raïssa did. Here, too, I have a definite prejudice.

Similarly, despite the criticism of L'Abbé *et al*, I am unable to interpret Jacques and Raïssa's suicide pact and Raïssa's subsequent statements about the positive aspects of illness in anything but a negative way.

Suther's book is neither the documentation of religious experience, as the writers

of one letter seem to maintain, nor a work primarily of literary criticism, as the writer of the other claims. It is, however, the biography of a human being. I understand the sympathy and admiration Suther—and L'Abbé, Amodio, Doering, Dunaway, Mancini, and Simon—extend to Raïssa Maritain. I simply do not share it.

MADELINE MARGET

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If Zionism is racism, then slavery is freedom, peace is war, and truth is a lie.

For 15 years, one third of its life, the United Nations has lived with a resolution that defamed the Jewish people by equating its liberation movement, Zionism, with racism and racial discrimination.

The time has come for the U.N. to cleanse itself of this libel, to remove this vestige of its period of extremism and confrontation and to honor its charter.

THE HARMFUL EFFECTS of this Resolution 3379, adopted on November 10, 1975, are hard to exaggerate:

- In the Middle East it retarded the growth of realism and compromise in the Palestinian Arab camp, while encouraging a siege mentality in Israel.

- In the human rights field it confused the issue of racism and thus set back the struggle against real forms of racial bigotry as well as encouraging

a tolerance for anti-Semitism.

- It supplied a justification for international terrorism as a form of legitimate struggle.

- And not the least, it swelled the ranks of people who dismiss the U.N. as an "Alice in Wonderland" world filled with mad hatters who might next declare slavery to be freedom.

Today the new political thinking at the U.N. seeks cooperation over confrontation, reconciliation over

mistrust.

And so, in the 45th session of the U.N. General Assembly, with the decade of the 1990s promising a world of truly united nations, we earnestly petition the U.N. member-states to repeal Resolution 3379.

BESIDES UNDOING a grave injustice, it will also serve as a signal of peace to those who must ultimately live together in troubled Middle East.

Repeal the resolution. Restore the integrity of the U.N.

Kent E. Schiner
International President, B'nai B'rith

Peter B. Kovler, Chairman
The Campaign to Rescind the
Zionism - Racism Resolution

Thomas Neumann
Executive Vice President, B'nai B'rith

Congressman Les Aspin / Senator Lloyd Bentsen / Senator Rudy Boschwitz / Senator Bill Bradley / Mayor Tom Bradley / Zbigniew Brzezinski / Henry Steele Commager / Harvey Cox / Senator Alan Cranston / Governor Mario Cuomo / Misha Dichter / Mayor David Dinkins / Father Robert Drinan / Peter Edelman / Stuart Eizenstat / Mayor Wilson Goode / Congressman Lee Hamilton / Senator Orrin Hatch / Sanford Hollander / Benjamin Hooks / Irving Louis Horowitz / Senator Daniel Inouye / Senator Edward Kennedy / Senator John Kerry / Coretta Scott King / Philip Klutznick / Rabbi Harold Kushner / Seymour Lachman / Congressman Tom Lantos / Senator Frank Lautenberg / Julius Lester / Senator Carl Levin / Congressman John Lewis / Senator Richard Lugar / Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan / Robert Nathan / Senator Sam Nunn / Congressman David Obey / Congressman Major Owens / Joseph Papp / Joseph Rauh / Dmitri Simes / Senator Paul Simon / Senator Arlen Specter / Ted Van Dyk / Congressman Craig Washington / Congressman Sidney Yates



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